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Security Council

Seventy-second year

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Tuesday, 31 October 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Le Drian/Mrs. Gueguen	(France)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Ali
	Russian Federation	Mr. Zagaynov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Ms. Wallström
	Ukraine	Mr. Kyslytsya
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Lord Ahmad
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821)

Letter dated 20 October 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2017/892)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821)

Letter dated 20 October 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2017/892)

The President (*spoke in French*): I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, Ministers and other representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, the Sudan, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; and Mr. Mubin Shaikh, civil society representative.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Charles Whitely, Head of the Human Rights and Social Affairs Section of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; and Mr. Swen Dornig, Senior Advisor Children and Armed Conflict, Resolute Support Mission, North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/821, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

I wish to also draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/892, which contains a letter dated 20 October 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in French*): I would like, first of all, to thank the Minister Foreign Affairs of France, Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, for the organization of this debate of vital importance concerning the question of children and armed conflict. The report (S/2017/821) before the Security Council today indicates that in 2016 children continued to be affected by decisions and actions of political and military leaders in different ways.

(*spoke in English*)

Children around the world are suffering enormously and unacceptably by conflict. This is a source of global shame. The period covered by my report revealed an alarming level of violations. We see armed groups forcing girls and boys to act as suicide bombers. We see children stigmatized for having been recruited and used by armed groups. We see children held criminally responsible for acts they were forced to commit. And we see parties to conflict often obstructing lifesaving aid for children. Over the period covered by the report, we witnessed the most child casualties ever recorded by the United Nations in Afghanistan; a doubling of verified cases of recruitment and use of children in Syria and Somalia; and widespread sexual violence against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan and elsewhere. Tens of millions of children across the globe were also uprooted from their homes by fighting — their families often split apart, their childhoods disrupted, their futures put at risk.

Despite that bleak picture, some progress has been made. Changes to the reporting process this year allowed for deeper engagement with parties to conflict to encourage the implementation of measures to better protect children. Many entities are now undertaking such measures, as my report outlines. I have my asked my Special Representative to work closely with those parties to improve their efforts to spare children from the horrors of war. Measures to better protect children were put in place by five Government security forces and four armed groups during 2016. They ranged from specific steps such as the release of children held in prison in Somalia, to substantive measures affecting complex operations such as those undertaken by the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in the Yemen, led by Saudi Arabia.

While there is progress, the scale and intensity of some of today's crises require us to redouble our efforts and take innovative approaches. The cross-border elements of conflict are increasing year by year. To address that we need to strengthen our engagement with regional and subregional actors. We should also encourage additional legal and political commitments to protect children, as well as other measures that my Special Representative is developing. I appeal to Member States to provide resources to support those initiatives.

In 2016 thousands of children were released from armed groups and armed forces, yet only half were successfully reintegrated into their families and communities, most notably by UNICEF and its partners. We must do more to provide funding and capacity for programmes that offer education, job training, counselling and family reunification. The legal framework to protect children in armed conflict is in place. I call on all parties to conflict to respect the framework in all conflict situations. We also must pursue accountability for abhorrent crimes and violations of human rights and humanitarian law. If we leave the next generation traumatized, seething with grievances, we betray those we serve and ourselves. I call on all parties to conflict to work with the United Nations, both on the ground and in New York, to ensure that we protect the most vulnerable of members' populations and the most precious resource of their countries, their children. And I urge the Security Council to strongly support this work as we strive together to build long-term peace, stability and development.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Gamba.

Ms. Gamba: I took up the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General in May. This is the first time I have the pleasure of briefing the Security Council in the Chamber in that capacity. I would like to take this opportunity to thank France and its Foreign Minister, His Excellency Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, for taking the initiative to hold this debate.

I will start by echoing the sentiments of the Secretary-General, and stress my worry at the information outlined in his report (S/2017/821). In my short time in this position, I have observed with grave concern the picture painted through the information collected by United Nations child-protection actors on the ground, including UNICEF, whose representatives are seated behind me. Over 20,000 violations affecting children were documented by those dedicated colleagues in 2016. That is a horrifying number of boys and girls who were subjected to unspeakable acts, mostly by armed groups, but also by Government forces and unknown armed actors.

Children were used as the fuel of war in the reporting period, and they have fared little better in 2017. Our most recent information indicates that the number of children recruited and used has remained at startling levels in South Sudan and Somalia. Attacks on schools and hospitals have been alarmingly high in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Conflict is ongoing in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and child casualties are all too common. In recent months, armed groups and Governments have continued to delay and deny lifesaving aid to children. Sexual violence against boys and girls is also widespread in many countries currently experiencing conflict.

I firmly believe that every generation has its most acute shame when it comes to armed conflict. For example, the First World War witnessed the use of gas on soldiers — one of the many disgraces of that generation. What we have inflicted upon children in war zones in recent years will be our disgrace. We must take urgent action to address the use of children as expendable commodities by warring parties.

In that regard, the recent announcement of additional commitments to protect children by Member States is a source of hope. In particular, I would like to highlight the Paris Principles as an important initiative that helps protect victims of recruitment and use. There are also a number of other steps that Member States have taken, such as ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child or endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration. I am very pleased that Yemen endorsed the Declaration on 17 October, and I hope that other Member States will follow suit.

Making those commitments is an important first step, but we need to work together to ensure that those political pledges make a practical difference for children on the ground. We have seen that, when there is political will, working together has resulted in tangible progress. The report documents such advances in diverse situations — ranging from Nigeria, with the signing of an action plan by the Civilian Joint Task Force, to the delisting of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines. Colombia has also been a bright spot, with the separation of children from the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo. And it would be remiss of me not to mention the strong progress by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which led to their delisting for recruitment and use of children.

The Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen, led by Saudi Arabia, also put in place several measures aimed at better protection of children. Those efforts were acknowledged in the annexes to Secretary-General's annual report. A technical team from my Office has just returned from Riyadh, where they met the Force Commander and reviewed and helped to strengthen those measures. Similar activities are being prepared for the next few months with Yemeni and Sudanese authorities, among others, to reinforce existing mechanisms, open new child protection units and provide additional training. I hope that these examples of cooperation and political engagement can be used as models by others.

We need to roll out such best practices in as many situations as possible in order to better protect children. The Security Council has a vital role to play in aiding this endeavour. It can use the tools available to it to ensure that as many parties as possible are open to serious discussions with United Nations child protection actors on reducing and, indeed ending, violations.

One particular issue highlighted in the report is that of armed groups that utilize tactics of terror or are considered violent extremists. This is not necessarily a new challenge, but it is significant nonetheless. With so called violent extremist groups, we have seen an increase in violations year upon year across the six grave violations. It is indeed a great challenge to put a stop to these horrors, but while there may be a temptation to adapt approaches to counter such armed groups, we must ensure that all responses are in line with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. In particular, we must place precaution, distinction and proportionality at the heart of our military efforts.

It is also important to recall the key tenet of the Paris Principles that all children allegedly associated with armed groups and armed forces are primarily victims. They must be treated as such, and I urge the adoption of protocols for their handover to civilian child protection actors. We must also avoid stigmatizing these children. I am sure Mr. Shaikh will speak further on this issue.

In my short time in this role, I have seen that the separation, demobilization and reintegration of children are vital interventions. They are much more effective than mass detention at creating long-term security. We must give these processes every chance of success. I would like to take this opportunity to appeal for adequate funding from Member States to implement and sustain reintegration, reinsertion and reskilling programmes. These programmes, led most notably by UNICEF in collaboration with many other actors, have helped release and reintegrate over 100,000 children since we first reported to the Security Council.

I also encourage the Security Council to focus on the detrimental impact on children of the widespread screening of civilians in situations of armed conflict. While some children are detained on the basis of their association with an armed group, others are deprived of their liberty for significant periods owing to the area where they happen to live. Although Member States have an obligation to ensure the security of their citizens, we must not further victimize children. It will only damage the future generation and create grievances.

I would like to end by underlining some core efforts we can make to improve our response to violations.

First, we cannot continue to allow impunity to prevail. Member States must prioritize accountability to break the cycles of violence and aid prevention efforts. We can all work to strengthen our support for justice systems of Member States affected by armed conflict. In particular, we should provide expertise on investigating and prosecuting crimes against children.

As the Secretary-General has said, we must also enhance partnerships. I welcome the leadership and contributions of regional and subregional organizations regarding the protection of children, but I feel we can do much more together. Working with these organizations will be one of the key tenets of my mandate tenure. I truly believe that it will be a significant multiplier for our efforts and I hope I can receive the resources to engage in this task.

We also need resources within conflict settings. I call upon the Security Council to continue to request the deployment of dedicated child protection capacity to United Nations peace operations. This is vitally important, but something that is currently under scrutiny. It is a great paradox that this capacity is being reduced at the very time we need it the most. Without sufficient resources, we will not be able to deliver on the mandate given to the United Nations by the Security Council. These actors make a real difference in the lives of children and tangibly support senior civilian and military leadership in their efforts to protect children.

Lastly, we need peace. While it might seem trite to say, it is the most effective way to prevent violations against children. Politically, we must look at conflict prevention and resolution efforts in a different manner. We must recognize that children are at the heart of, and not at the periphery of, contemporary armed conflict. The children and armed conflict mandate has a vital contribution to make to the prevention cycle. In this regard, when peace is in its fledgling stages, child protection provisions must be included in ceasefires and peace agreements.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Gamba.

I now give the floor to Mr. Shaikh.

Mr. Shaikh: I express my sincerest gratitude to the French Mission for having invited me. It is a great honour to be with the members of the Security Council to share some of my thoughts on the use of children in armed conflict.

I went through a period of six years of radicalization into extremism when I was a teenager, after a period of travel to Taliban-controlled areas owing to an identity conflict, a poisonous ideology received from other teens, and a search for meaning and belonging. It was only after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that I turned away from that way of thinking. I ended up studying Islam properly and went through a period of de radicalization. I then began work as an undercover operative with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Integrated National Security Enforcement Team, where I would spend too much time seeing how children, teens and adults were exploited by extremists.

I have been intimately involved on the counter-Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) file, where I saw on social media — in real time — children and teenagers being employed by extremist groups, such as the Taliban, Al-Qaida and its affiliates — Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and so forth — and, of course, ISIS and its affiliates, such as Boko Haram.

In my training of police and intelligence services, I use a video that haunts me every time I play it. It shows a three-year-old whose parents make their boy, not two feet tall, take a knife the size of his arm, which he then uses to behead his teddy bear. What will come of this boy when he turns 10 or 15? Will he even live to 20? This is the real life story of where we are today and what we will deal with tomorrow. Let us not wait until the child suicide bomber has hit at home for us to take action.

Around the world, non-State armed groups, including violent extremists, are using children to sow violence, carry out attacks, build their ranks and prolong their beliefs and agenda into the future. The recruitment and use of children are carried out in a systematic and intentional manner. This is no accident; these groups realize that they can gain an advantage by using children that does not come with adults. They recruit children for a number of tactical and strategic reasons — children are easier to forcibly or coercively recruit and indoctrinate; the use and indoctrination of children from a young age can help perpetuate their fight and make them more difficult to defeat; security forces often view children with less suspicion, making them useful as spies, couriers and suicide bombers; the reluctance of security forces to face children in battle; and the diminishing of community support for Government if the security forces target children owing to their use by adults.

If members have not already become aware of the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers — a timely document currently being generated by the Canadian Government and with the direct input and support of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative — they need to. The use of children by such groups around the world is a growing threat, as they adapt to the international community's interventions and learn from what other groups are doing.

We also know that that is a fundamental moral and ethical dilemma for professional security forces, who may under-react, overreact or not react at all. The results of that can be catastrophic for all involved, in particular the children. We must respond to that challenge preventively. It is far better to ensure that children are never recruited and used in the first place than to address their disruptive childhood trauma and indoctrination after the fact. We need a comprehensive, coordinated and holistic response involving Governments, the United Nations and civil society, based on the strength and areas of responsibility for each.

One key takeaway for the members of the Council is that youth violence is on a continuum. Whether it is extremism of a religious or racial nature, urban street gangs, banditry or piracy, the challenge is the same — robbing the innocence of children and leaving them to die. A preventive approach must be holistic, while addressing the factors that lead to recruitment, how children are used, the need to demobilize and rehabilitate them, what works and what does not, and bringing together a wide range of groups that help address violent extremism — Government and security forces, the United Nations system and civil society. Security forces, whether military, police, peacekeepers or corrections personnel, have an important role to play, and must be prepared to address the issue.

The security sector has a critical role to play in that prevention-oriented approach, and must be adequately prepared and trained. Working in partnership with other governmental and non-governmental actors, with sensitivity to their roles and the need for neutrality, is key. As I have been taught by the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers initiative, security sector actors, such as the military, police and peacekeepers, must understand the specific reason why children are used by non-State armed groups, including violent extremists, and how their actions can help counter that or make the problem worse if they are not careful. As with all efforts to counter violent extremism, security sector actors must build mutual trust and respect with the affected communities, preventing the marginalization and mistrust that can help fuel recruitment. A key aspect of such an approach is ensuring that security sector actors are adequately prepared, with training, doctrine and policy to guide and inform their actions.

With children being intentionally and systematically used across the world in all forms of conflict, whether by armed groups, State forces or violent extremists, it is ever-more critical to address the problem head on. A robust, holistic and inclusive approach that puts children's rights upfront will allow us to protect children from harm, prevent violence in communities around the world and help create a more peaceful and equitable society for all.

Once again, I thank Council members for having me today. The issue of children and armed conflict is one that we can all agree must be dealt with quickly and competently. God bless the States Members of the United Nations with peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Shaikh for his briefing.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the matter on the Council's agenda. I thank the members of the Security Council for their valuable contributions to the statement.

In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, the statement by the President will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2017/21.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France.

At the outset, on behalf of the French presidency of the Council, I would like to thank the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for their briefings and their commitment. I reaffirm France's full support for their efforts.

I would also like to thank Mr. Mubin Shaikh for his important briefing. His testimony is a indeed a warning. I also commend UNICEF and civil society actors for their efforts. Every day, they help us move the agenda forward.

I would like to thank our Swedish, Italian and Senegalese colleagues with whom we have worked closely to ensure that today's meeting complements the Paris Conference on 21 February. We must continue along the path to a world without children who are victims of armed conflict. We have a shared responsibility to ensure that children are where they should be — in classrooms and loved by their families, not on the battlefield.

Because it is a universal moral obligation, for more than 20 years, the international community has been working to denounce, end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by States and non-State armed groups — a point that was underscored by the Secretary-General and the Special Representative. The international community's efforts have enabled genuine progress to be made. More than 110,000 child soldiers have been released since 2000 and almost 60,000 between 2007 and 2015.

For many years my country has been committed to protecting children in armed conflict. Since 1999, France has promoted the adoption of effective tools to protect children in conflict situations, some of them here in this very Chamber. Ten years ago, Paris hosted an international conference in Paris on the theme "Free children from war", at which the Paris Principles — which were noted by the previous speaker — were adopted. We call on those who have not yet done so to endorse the principles, as they serve as a basis for the protection of children in conflicts and the fight against the appalling violence to which they fall victim. The Security Council has adopted six resolutions on this issue, including resolution 1612 (2005), which is a fundamental new instrument. Its evidence-based approach is based on quality information and enables us to neutrally and impartially address such challenges. The international monitoring and reporting system at the Secretary-General's disposal plays a major role in that regard.

In spite of such progress, much remains to be done. A total of 230 million children still live in countries or zones affected by armed conflict, where they continue to be recruited and separated from their families, with no access to education, care or freedom. It must be noted that children are now the targets and the tools of terrorism. They are affected by current asymmetrical conflicts, and, as annex I to the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/821) confirms, non-State armed groups are primarily responsible for those violations. Out of 15,000 violations, 11,500 can be attributed to them. The plight of children in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen are a sad reminder that terrorist groups, in particular, are responsible for that troubling turn of events.

We also note that recruitment methods have changed. In addition to being forcibly recruited, children are radicalized and recruited online. The use, or rather the exploitation, of children has also changed. They are now used as human bombs or shields. Girls, in particular, suffer sexual violence, are recruited as slaves, sold by human trafficking networks or forced into marriage and to become pregnant. Let us recall the fate of Iraqi Yazidi children or the Chibok girls in Nigeria. Outrage is not enough; words must lead to action. Since the launch of the children and armed conflict agenda, the Council has had a key role to play in that regard.

We must take collective action and, above all, first gather as much information as possible on such violations. The Secretary-General's report is therefore a vital tool. We also support the Special Representative's efforts to assess good practices and solutions that have already garnered results. Secondly, we must take preventive action. We must build on existing efforts to prevent violent extremism, with a view to developing specific plans to address the new recruitment methods I have already mentioned, such as combating online radicalization, indoctrination or forced recruitment on the ground. In order to ensure more effective prevention, we can also use the results of awareness campaigns, such as the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, while paying particular attention to non-State armed groups.

Education is also a major issue. Let us start by protecting schools, which are often attacked and occupied by warring parties, which is why, on 21 February, France decided to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. We can no longer tolerate lost generations of children, like those in Syria, who are excluded in their millions from any schooling. Where progress has been made, we must ensure that there are no setbacks, while remaining vigilant. I refer, for example, to children who have been used by armed groups in the Central African Republic; we must ensure that they can return to a healthy environment.

To inform and prevent, we must thirdly strengthen our action on the ground. That is what we are doing, in close cooperation with UNICEF, in Nigeria and Yemen, so as to facilitate the reintegration of children who have been associated with armed groups. Armed forces, including United Nations operations — and I refer in particular to peacekeeping operations — need to be given clear concepts of operations that include prevention and the protection of children. In that respect, the deployment of child protection advisers is essential. We trust the Secretary-General to continue strengthening that dimension within peacekeeping operations.

Action plans signed with the United Nations are another very important tool. I note with great interest the idea put forward by the Special Representative to also work at the regional and subregional levels. The progress highlighted in the report, as in Mali or Colombia, often takes place at the regional level.

Fourthly, we must reintegrate children in accordance with international standards and fight against impunity. States must take responsibility and ratify international instruments that contribute to protecting children in armed conflict. With regard to reintegration, we must do our all to facilitate the permanent return of child victims of conflict to their families, while ensuring that they are monitored, particularly with respect to their psychological well-being, given the trauma they have suffered. Civil society — Save the Children, for example — does a lot in that regard. However, such policies are the primary responsibility of States.

The fight against impunity is indispensable. Important initiatives have been undertaken by the International Criminal Court and several States, such as Colombia. The greatest possible pressure must be exerted on those who commit such violence. With regard to the particularly overwhelming reality of sexual violence, I reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy. Justice must be rendered for such crimes.

The best interests of the child must prevail. What other project could more fundamentally unite us than that of our common future — that of children? We have a collective responsibility, which is why respecting and strengthening the rights of the child must remain at the centre of our actions. I count on the Council's commitment.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden.

Ms. Wallström (Sweden): First of all, I thank the Secretary-General and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Gamba, for their important briefings to the Council this morning. I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2017/821), because this year it has very clearly focused on protection and prevention, which we welcome. I also commend the Secretary-General and the Special Representative for their enhanced engagement with the concerned parties, which is very important.

I pay particular tribute to Mr. Mubin Shaikh for sharing his story with the Council. I cannot help but also turn to General Roméo Dallaire, because I want to thank him for everything he is doing when it comes to children in armed conflict.

As I said in the Council on Friday (see S/PV.8079), I visited Afghanistan last week. In Afghanistan, one in three civilian casualties of the conflict is a child. In addition, children continue to be recruited, particularly by armed groups. They remain at risk of sexual violence and are also subject to forced detention. I want Council members to imagine a classroom. The teacher has given the class an assignment to fill in the blank in the sentence: "I want to be ... when I grow up." A doctor? A lawyer? A teacher? One boy has no answer. A week later, his chair in the classroom is empty. His father died in the war, and the boy already knew that he would now have to provide for his family by working as a shoeshine. There are countless such stories. Some of them, like that one, were captured in a short film by a young filmmaker whom I met in Herat.

Children are the ones who are suffering most from the conflict. We all know that that is the case in every war and conflict. As we have already heard, we, the international community, have a responsibility. We must do all in our power to give every child the right to a childhood.

The Secretary-General's report details the shocking scale and severity of violations and abuses against children in armed conflicts around the world. To think of how children have been killed and maimed, recruited and used as human shields and human bombs is heartbreaking. We must not lose this generation of children. How we treat those affected by armed conflict has consequences for their future. Giving up on them means giving up on their communities and the countries that they live in.

While we cannot solve all the conflicts on the agenda of the Security Council here and now, we can protect the children who are suffering because of them. The children and armed conflict agenda is a framework for that. It gives us the tools to prevent all violations and abuses against children and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. There is a unique consensus within the Council on this agenda, and we should spare no effort in its implementation.

Sweden has a long tradition of working to strengthen the protection of children. As a member of the Security Council and as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, our aim is to advance that work further. There are a number of areas in which we believe there is room for improvement.

First, the Council has heard from child victims of non-State armed groups, including Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and Da'esh. Their stories, like Mubin's, are shocking. They have told us of their recruitment as child soldiers, of sexual slavery and mass abductions. We have a responsibility to act in the face of such attacks to our common humanity. The first step is to improve our work to prevent human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. That should include violations and abuses by all parties to a conflict, including State and non-State armed groups. In that regard, we call on those Member States that have not yet done so to sign the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Safe Schools Declaration. However, we, as the international community, must also ensure that our response to those groups is in accordance with international law.

Secondly, we should prioritize the effective reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups. Those children should always be treated primarily as victims. Successful reintegration is in the best interests not only of the child, but also of society as a whole. Children should always be part of the solution, and not part of the problem. That was a clear message sent during the Council's visit to the Lake Chad region.

Thirdly, we should guarantee the right to education and protect schools. That is important in order to prevent conflicts and build a sustainable peace. Sustainable Development Goal 4 underlines the important role of children's education in reducing poverty and inequality, and in that regard I want to mention girls' access to education in particular. As the penholder for children and armed conflict, we are very pleased that the Council today adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2017/21, which shows the Council's strong unity behind the children and armed conflict mandate. The statement strengthens the Council's stance on many of the issues that I have just raised.

Looking to the future, we will continue to lead on this issue. That includes using the Security Council and our role as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict as a platform to integrate child protection as a priority in peacekeeping, prevention and the agenda for sustaining peace, as well as to stand up for the integrity of the children and armed conflict mandate. We can and will work hard in all of our efforts, both inside and outside the Council, to ensure children's rights to education and health — including mental health and psychosocial support in conflicts — and to enable children to make their voices heard.

Protecting children today prevents conflicts tomorrow. When we give children their futures back, we give them the opportunity to realize their dream, whether it is to become a doctor, a lawyer or a teacher. By doing so, we put in place the building blocks for peaceful and sustainable societies. The children trapped in armed conflict today have no time to lose; neither should we. It is time for action.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine): I would like to thank the delegation of France for its excellent performance during its presidency of the Security Council and express our appreciation for its convening of these debates.

We are deeply concerned ov er the alarming scale and severity of violations committed against children, as documented in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/821). There is an urgent need to intensify the efforts of the international community to ensure the enhanced protection of children in armed conflict.

Ukraine has always been consistent in its policy on ensuring the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. We were among the first States to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as to endorse the Paris Commitments and the Paris Principles. That is strong evidence of our commitments and pledges in this sphere. It is important that more and more countries join our efforts in order to achieve the universal acceptance of those documents. We also attach great importance to the Safe Schools Declaration. In September, Ukraine's Minister of Education and Science announced firm support for the initiative to endorse the Declaration, thereby underscoring our commitment to promote and protect children's rights.

Paragraph 3 of the Secretary-General's report reads as follows:

> "[T]he present report documents situations in which apparent violations of international norms and standards for the protection of children affected by conflict are considered to be of such gravity as to warrant international concern".

Let me give examples of what the experts under the previous leadership did not believe warranted international concern and attention.

According to the United Nations human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine, which has already produced 19 reports, 90 boys and 47 girls have lost their lives since the beginning of the Russian aggression. Eighty children were killed as a result of Flight MH-17 being shot down by a Russian missile. Sixty-eight children have been maimed in the conflict zone by mines and unexploded ordnance. Overall, some 15,000 children living in the grey zone are at risk of being maimed or killed due to fighting, mines or unexploded ordnance. As I said, 19 periodic reports have already been produced by the United Nations, yet none of that information made its way into those reports.

We should also not forget that there are thousands of children in Ukraine whose lives have been severely affected by a war brought to our soil by a neighbouring country that is, ironically, a permanent member of the Council. According to State authorities in Ukraine, out of approximately 1.7 million internally displaced persons, 240,000 are children. Almost 200,000 boys and girls live in the 15-kilometre zone along the line of contact on both sides, yet that is not part of the report. Moreover, according to non-governmental data, in over 80 cases children were recruited in the non-Government controlled areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The reports of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also prove that irregular armed formations in the east of Ukraine are preventing young men from leaving Donetsk and forcefully recruiting them to join their ranks, which could amount to human trafficking.

More than a year ago, terrorists in the city of Yasynuvata, in the occupied areas of the Donetsk region, detained six teenage boys, accusing them of sabotage activities. Those children remain captive today. I also wish to express our utmost dismay that representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations and OSCE continue to be denied access to them. That is indeed unacceptable and represents a flagrant violation of those children's rights. There have been reports from various sources that children as young as 15 years old are being recruited into armed youth groups and taking part in active combat as full-fledged members of combined Russia-backed militant forces, including as youth reconnaissance and sabotage groups operating in the Government-controlled territory.

Ukraine has undertaken a number of steps at the legislative and executive levels to enhance the protection of the rights of displaced children who have been forced to leave their homes due to the aggression of a permanent member of the Council. Those internally displaced children have unhindered access to education in their current places of residence. For those children who remain in the temporarily occupied territories, the Government has introduced special programmes to give them an opportunity to receive higher education at Ukrainian universities. This year alone, over 1,500 students enrolled in our universities through the Crimea-Ukraine and Donbas-Ukraine special educational centres.

It is worth highlighting that children in the occupied areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and in Crimea are deprived of the right to receive education in the Ukrainian language and even to study it. To illustrate that point, the number of classes with Ukrainian as the primary language of instruction has plunged by a factor of 31 in Crimea over the past two years. I would like to recall in that regard that in April, the International Court of Justice issued an order regarding the request of Ukraine for the indication of provisional measures in the case concerning *Application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*

(Ukraine v. Russian Federation). The Court order demanded that Russia "ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language".

Moreover, children living in proximity to the line of contact in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and those who were forced to leave their homes regularly suffer from symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder. In that regard, we highly value the practical assistance of UNICEF in providing training for psychologists who work on a daily basis with children, students, teachers and other education personnel to address that problem.

In that regard, I wish to reiterate that we deeply regret that the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict does not contain any reference to the situation of Ukrainian children affected by the conflict in the Donbas region of Ukraine. I am personally convinced that the current leadership of the United Nations and the current leader on the issue are committed, and I believe that the deficiencies of previous reports will be eliminated in future reports of the United Nations.

In closing, let me reiterate Ukraine's commitment to doing our utmost to ensure the protection of children in armed conflicts.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the United Nations of the United Kingdom.

Baron Ahmad (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821), and the Special Representative, Ms. Gamba, for her insights on children and armed conflict and her important work in that area. In doing so, I would also like to recognize the hard work carried out by the United Nations country task forces and peace operations, often in difficult circumstances, to provide reliable, evidence-based information on violations against children. At this juncture, I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Mr. Mubin Shaikh for his personal insights into that important area.

When it comes to children's lives, no efforts can be spared. Children are innocent bystanders in times of conflict, caught up in the atrocities taking place around them. That is why the evidence in the annual report is so alarming. It shows that grave violations continue to be committed on an increasing scale. In the many conflicts taking place around the world, children are being maimed and killed, recruited and used as child soldiers, and denied basic humanitarian access.

In some conflicts, there has been a growing trend to detain children on security charges. That is deeply concerning. No child should be detained unless he or she is charged with a recognizable criminal offence and only in accordance with international law and juvenile justice standards. Authorities should seek alternatives to detention, and if they detain juveniles, they should prioritize their rehabilitation and reintegration and fully protect their human rights.

The United Kingdom considers the agreement and implementation of the United Nations action plans to be a vital step in improving the protection of children. We therefore call on all parties listed within the annex of the Secretary-General's report that have not put those measures in place to do so as a matter of priority. We also call on all other parties that have put measures in place to honour their commitments in full. I would like to highlight two aspects of the issue that are of particular concern to the Government of the United Kingdom.

The first is to ensure that children continue to have access to education in times of crisis. That is vital, first, in order to provide young people with at least a degree of normalcy and stability, and secondly, to give them the skills they need to advocate for a better, more peaceful future for themselves, their families and their communities. The United Kingdom continues to provide educational support to the millions of children around the world in need of education in emergencies and protracted crises. Following on from the No Lost Generation initiative of UNICEF, where £82 million of United Kingdom international development funding was allocated to provide protection, trauma care and education for children affected by the crisis in Syria and the wider region, the United Kingdom is committing £30 million this year in support of the Education Cannot Wait initiative. I urge all Member States to support such initiatives, which help provide education to those children most in need.

The second issue of particular concern to the United Kingdom is the sexual exploitation and abuse of children by United Nations peacekeepers and other personnel operating in the name of the United Nations. The annual report shows that such abuse remained a major issue in the Central African Republic in 2016. It is abhorrent and absolutely unacceptable. United Nations peacekeepers must respect and protect the rights of children. Children expect and trust peacekeepers to protect them. Every time a peacekeeper fails to do so, that trust and the integrity of the United Nations are gravely undermined.

However, it is not only peacekeepers who commit offences against children. Reports continue to indicate that some personnel in development and humanitarian agencies are also guilty of abusing their positions. In the past, our collective failure to prosecute allegations of child rape and sexual exploitation and abuse has sent a signal to the predators that working under the United Nations banner protects them from being held accountable for their actions and facing justice. There must be no more impunity for perpetrators of such heinous offences against innocent and vulnerable children.

The United Kingdom will insist on a zero-tolerance approach towards sexual exploitation and abuse, and we expect the United Nations to demonstrate the highest possible standards of protection for children, including actions to prevent abuse, investigate all allegations and report annually on progress. The United Kingdom's International Development Secretary's comments on child rape in her speech on United Nations reform resonated strongly at the General Assembly. We will continue to work closely with the United Nations to bring together other Member States to explore how to improve accountability of any of our citizens who face substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. We want to end the culture of impunity so that all children are protected and all those charged with abuse are brought to justice.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the progress that has been made and look to the future. In 2016, the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a stable and Long Lasting Peace, signed between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejercito del Pueblo brought an end to over 50 years of conflict. The reincorporation of FARC-EP minors is now a major focus for the implementation of the peace accords. We have also witnessed a temporary ceasefire with the National Liberation Army, including a commitment to stop recruiting children into its ranks. Those are encouraging early steps in what will hopefully become a more substantive peace process.

Elsewhere, United Nations engagement with non-State armed groups in Mali and the Sudan has led to the signing of two new action plans, while in the Philippines more than 1,850 children have been freed from the military wing of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Those are important milestones that perhaps were unthinkable over 20 years ago, when the Graça Machel's report was published (A/51/306). Such achievements would not have been possible without the mandate and work of the Special Representative, which the United Kingdom continues to fully support.

Children are the innocent victims of conflict. Let us today renew our determination to work together to protect the many children caught up in conflict, get them back to school and give them hope of a brighter future, free from fear and conflict.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We thank France and you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate, which is a demonstration of France's commitment to this noble cause.

We also wish to express our appreciation to Sweden for its efforts as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Swedish Minister for her commitment and that of her country.

I wish to thank the Secretary-General for being with us today and for his briefing. I also want to express appreciation to the other briefers, Ms. Virginia Gamba and Mr. Mubin Shaikh.

We welcome the adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/21) on children in armed conflict and we look forward to the compilation of comprehensive best practices on the mandate on children and armed conflict, including practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes.

We note with serious concern the continued grave violations against children in armed conflicts, particularly in relation to recruitment and use, killing and maming, as well as humanitarian access, as highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/821) on children and armed conflict. Grave violations by terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram and the Al-Shabaab, in relation to recruitment and use in asymmetric warfare, particularly the use of children as suicide bombers, continue to pose a serious protection challenge, including to United Nations peacekeeping missions. We also note with serious concern the impact of armed conflict and grave violations by parties to armed conflicts on children resulting in their forcible displacement and serious protection challenges. Ms. Gamba and Mr. Shaikh highlighted the challenges faced in that area. It would be difficult after having heard them to add much that be very meaningful. I wish to thank them again.

While welcoming the signing of action plans by parties to armed conflict, we note with concern issues associated with their implementation, particularly as a result of armed conflict and limited support in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of children, including those associated with terrorist groups. While noting the recommendations identified by the Secretary-General in his report, we would like to focus on four points that, in our view, could contribute to strengthening the protection of children in armed conflict.

First, the implementation of national action plans, particularly in the area of securing the release of children associated with armed forces and armed groups, as well as ensuring their disarmament, demobilization and reintegration ,will require sustained engagement and support, which could include, inter alia, ensuring the availability of child protection advisers in situations of armed conflict and operationalizing such action plans.

Secondly, international humanitarian law requires parties to an armed conflict to treat children associated with armed groups, including those engaged in violent extremism, as victims entitled to full protection of their human rights and to urgently put in place alternatives to the detention and prosecution of children. Children should be detained only as a last resort, and for the shortest period necessary. Ensuring that special measures are taken to protect children when they are detained, regardless of the reason for their deprivation of liberty, is important. That is particularly relevant in relation to children associated with terrorist or violent extremist groups.

Thirdly, internally displaced and refugee children often become unaccompanied and are more vulnerable to forced recruitment, sexual violence, exploitation, deprivation of liberty and ill treatment during detention. They must be treated with special care, bearing in mind their needs in terms of access to shelter, food, clean water, health care, education and the provision of official documentation, without which they may be at risk of becoming stateless. Much more needs to be done in finding durable solutions to those internally displaced and refugee children. That will require strengthened support from development actors to countries emerging from conflicts, as well as to large refugee-hosting countries.

Fourthly, much more needs to be done to enhance cooperation between the Security Council and regional and subregional organizations. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict could play a critical role in exploring mechanisms to further strengthen such cooperation. For instance, in our region, since 2014, consultative meetings focused on the protection of children in armed conflicts were held between the African Union Peace and Security Council and the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. With the upcoming appointment of a special rapporteur in December, such consultative meetings will play a critical role in responding to the protection challenges associated with children affected by armed conflicts in Africa. In that context, we would like to encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to explore mechanisms to further strengthen the cooperation of her Office with the African Union Peace and Security Council, including in the context of such consultative meetings aimed at ensuring the full implementation of plans of action signed with parties to armed conflicts and the follow-up of the conclusions of the Security Council Working Group pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005), as well as the mainstreaming of child protection.

As a major troop-contributing country, Ethiopia has taken various measures in order to ensure the protection of children in areas where our troops are deployed. Our troops are guided by the rules of engagement, which are elaborated within the framework of our obligations under international humanitarian law, particularly the 1949 Geneva Conventions and Protocols Additional I and II. We have also put in place a mechanism to ensure accountability and address any violations by our troops deployed in any mission. Over the years, that framework has enabled us to address any protection challenges. As one of the largest refugee-hosting countries, we also continue to provide international protection to refugee children, including unaccompanied minors who are forcibly displaced as a result of grave violations by parties to armed conflicts.

I would like to conclude my remarks by affirming the commitment of Ethiopia to continuing its work with relevant actors to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict, including here in the Council and at the level of the African Union.

Mr. Cardi (Italy) (*spoke in French*): Before beginning, allow me to thank the French presidency and the French delegation for the excellent manner in which they have guided the work of the Security Council during the month of October.

(*spoke in English*)

First of all, I wish to thank the French presidency for convening today's open debate. I also commend the briefers, and Mr. Mubin Shaikh for his testimony.

We think that the presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/21) that we have just adopted is a concrete response to the call for action that, you, Sir, have made.

The nature of armed conflict has evolved in recent years. We especially see a significant increase in the involvement of non-State armed actors. Of course, there is the radicalization of conflicts. The consequences have not changed. Children are still among those who suffer the most. They are recruited as soldiers, abducted and exploited. They are victims of neglect, trafficking, sexual violence and forced marriage. They are denied the right to education — and the same goes for disabled children, who, of course, have an even worse fate.

Substantive progress has been achieved since the publication of the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306), including thanks to the work carried out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. Significantly, that progress has led to the signing of 29 action plans, 18 of which are with non-State armed groups. The result is all the more significant, considering the difficulties of engaging with such groups. We also welcome to different approach applied in the past year to the list annexed to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/821). We hope that it will encourage more parties to armed conflicts to put in place measures to improve the protection of children, including by signing and implementing action plans. Let me address the issue from four concrete perspectives.

First, we think that we need to continue fostering the widest possible adhesion by States to the relevant international instruments and promote their effective implementation and enforcement, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We encourage countries to do even more and make political commitments to better protect children affected by armed conflicts. Endorsing initiatives like the Paris Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration, which Italy fully supports, would make a significant change in the lives of many children.

Secondly, Italy strongly supports the inclusion of child-protection-related provisions in the mandates of the United Nations peace operations. We included such a provision when we renewed the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) this year. It is important that peacekeeping and political missions have the necessary means to monitor, report and respond to grave violations. To that end, we must ensure that child-protection-adviser positions are duly staffed and budgeted.

Thirdly, we consider it extremely important to offer peacekeeping personnel specific training on child protection. Targeted predeployment training of United Nations personnel on children in armed conflict should be fully scaled up and become standard practice for the United Nations, in coordination with regional organizations. In Italy, modules on respect for human rights and international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians are included in all the courses that the Centre of Excellence for Stability Police Units, for example, offers each year to peacekeepers.

Fourthly, ending abuses by persistent perpetrators does not end impunity altogether. States need to adopt, develop and implement the legal and administrative measures needed to ensure that the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and non-State armed groups is criminalized and that perpetrators are brought to justice, in compliance with the provisions of the relevant international instruments.

During our term on the Security Council, we have looked at human rights violations in the field, particularly those related to children, to articulate the Council's response. For instance, in January 2017, under the Swedish presidency, the Security Council included a separate listing criterion on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts, when it renewed the sanctions regime for the Central African Republic. In addition, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has an essential role to play in holding persistent perpetrators accountable for their crimes. We therefore welcome the Court's sentencing of the militia leader from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, for war crimes, including the conscription of children. We also commend the adoption of a policy on children by the ICC in November 2016.

Finally, preventing and responding to the scourge of children affected by armed conflict in all its aspects are not just a matter of concern and action by the Security Council. It requires joint effort by all stakeholders — Governments, human rights and humanitarian actors, military and security forces and regional, national, international and non-governmental organizations.

I would like to conclude by stressing the need to consider the views of children and of the families and communities to which they return when defining and implementing any strategy at the local or global level. Indeed, in serving the best interests of children, we serve the best interests of all humankind.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I would like to begin by thanking Foreign Minister Le Drian of France for being here to preside over today's discussion on children in armed conflict. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Guterres and Special Representative Gamba for their briefings and their work on this issue, as well as our guest briefer, Mr. Shaikh, for his important and unique perspective.

We should all be disturbed by this year's report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821). The report shows that in conflicts around the world children are being killed and maimed, abducted and attacked in schools and hospitals, recruited to fight, sexually abused and denied humanitarian aid by State and non-State actors alike. All parties to armed conflict should share the goal of protecting children from violence, and yet all too often violations and abuses of international law affecting children in armed conflict are rampant. Of particular concern to the United States is the scale and gravity of such violations and abuses against children by terrorist organizations, including the Taliban, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. Those groups are responsible for many of the most barbaric attacks, having committed over 6,800 violations and abuses against children, as documented by the United Nations.

South Sudan also remains a major cause for concern. The number of children who have been recruited by armed groups is approximately 17,000 — coincidentally, about the same number as the staff in the United Nations peacekeeping mission in South Sudan. Ambassador Haley just returned from that country, where she issued a strong warning to President Kiir: "the hate and the violence that we are seeing has to stop". She also told President Kiir during their meeting that he could not deny the actions of his military, whether it was related to violence or rape or child soldiers. Sexual violence against girls and boys in particular, including mass gang rape, has intensified even in parts of the country that were once deemed safe for them. The United Nations and the Security Council should bring all of our influence and tools to bear so as to ensure that all parties to the conflict in South Sudan immediately end committing all violations and abuses against children.

This month Ambassador Haley also visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where she witnessed at first hand the plight of children caught in the crossfire of conflict. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has never witnessed a democratic peaceful transfer of power, has been plagued by dozens of armed groups vying for power and control, with rape used as a weapon of war and children recruited as soldiers.

As reported by the Secretary-General, the recruitment and use of children by non-State actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains rampant, and child casualties in the country are up by 75 per cent, as compared to 2015. And sexual violence as a weapon of war is endemic, with more than 60 per cent of survivors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo being children. Every day displaced women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo fear being assaulted or seeing their children abducted. This must end. As Ambassador Haley emphasized on a recent trip, "we cannot turn a blind eye to all of this. No one should live like this."

To better help children victimized by armed conflict, the United States would like to emphasize three points.

First, we need to demand that all parties to a conflict, including State actors, fulfil their obligations under international law that bear on the protection of children. Those obligations include avoiding the unlawful recruitment of children. All of us must do more to make sure parties to conflicts understand these responsibilities and fulfil them.

Secondly, when parties to conflict fail to comply with the obligations that bear on the protection of children in conflict, we must hold them accountable. Atrocities committed by the Al-Assad regime in Syria, enabled by Iran, Hizbullah and Russia, show what happens when the Security Council fails to demand accountability. In 2016, the Al-Assad regime slaughtered thousands of civilians in Aleppo and gassed its own people using banned chemical weapons. Schools and hospitals have been repeatedly attacked. The immediate and long-term impact on children in Syria of these atrocities is impossible to calculate. We must not stop pushing to bring the perpetrators of these acts to justice and to get help to the civilians who need it.

Similarly, in Yemen, the Houthis, Al-Qaida and militias on all sides reportedly continued to recruit children in spite of our numerous demands to stop. The Yemeni Government must also urgently take further steps to stop any unlawful recruitment of children in its ranks. All parties to the conflict in Yemen need to do more to ensure the protection of civilians.

Thirdly, the United Nations, humanitarian partners and Member States should do more to focus on what happens to children after they are released from recruitment or suffer wartime atrocities. For example, we must ensure resources are available to meet the needs of all children subject to grave violations and abuses, including survivors of sexual violence. Those children desperately need assistance, including psychological support, food and shelter and medical assistance. We must not let them down or allow them to return to the battlefield.

The proliferation of child deaths, abuses, attacks on hospitals and schools and unlawful recruitment in armed conflict shows the importance of the capacity of the United Nations to alleviate the suffering of those children. As we consider our Security Council mandates, the United States recognizes the importance of maintaining the role of child-protection officers in United Nations field missions, as the report recommends.

In conclusion, even in such a grim landscape, it is important to note progress. More than 60 countries have action plans in place with the United Nations. From Afghanistan to Chad, a number of Governments have continued their good-faith work to fully implement those actions plans to end abuses suffered by children in conflict. We still have a long way to go with regard to stemming the tide of abuse and horror faced by children in conflict situations. The United States will continue to stand behind the important work being done by the United Nations to protect those children.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank France for having organized this open debate on an issue that is of particular importance and on which the international community must continue its work. I also thank you, Minister Le Drian, for presiding over our work. I would also like to express our appreciation for the participation and briefings by Secretary-General António Guterres; Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; and Mr. Mubin Shaikh, civil society representative of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative.

The changing and complex nature of current conflicts presents us with the challenge of having to continually adapt the mechanisms and strategies that we use to protect children in conflict zones. In that regard, we underscore the work regularly being done by the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. We align ourselves with the statement to be made by the representative of Canada on its behalf. Likewise, we highlight the endeavours of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which help maintain a consistent focus on the issue on the agenda on the Security Council.

Uruguay gratefully welcomes the annual report (S/2017/821) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflicts, submitted earlier this month, which, in its annexes, identifies parties to conflicts having committed serious violations against children. In that regard, although pointing out those who violate international law is a very important step, we reiterate the responsibility incumbent upon all States to end impunity and investigate and prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other atrocity crimes perpetrated against children, both at the national and international levels, while highlighting the fundamental role that the International Criminal Court plays in that regard. Similarly, Uruguay believes that those who sell weapons to countries in which grave violations are committed affecting children and those who use them share the responsibility of the consequences, and, in that vein we call on all States to immediately stop the sale and export of weapons to parties that have been listed in annexes of the Secretary-General's report.

Allow me to underscore Uruguay's commitment to protecting civilians in areas of armed conflict, in particular children, who are especially affected by those conflicts. Historically, Uruguay has been a champion of international instruments aimed at protecting children, and is proud to have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols with regard to children's participation in armed conflict. In that respect, although most States have raised the minimum recruitment age to 18-years-old for their armed forces, 43 States have yet to so. Attempting to end that practice among armed groups is therefore unrealistic, as certain States continue to consider children suitable for recruitment. Similarly, Uruguay signed the Safe Schools Declaration, and is committed to using guidelines to protect schools and universities from military use during armed conflicts. Respecting and protecting the right to education during armed conflict is a key factor in the reconstruction of a country emerging from conflict.

Uruguay recognizes the value of appropriately training personnel participating in peacekeeping missions. It therefore stringently requires that every Uruguayan contingent successfully complete a predeployment course on human rights, international humanitarian law, gender issues, child protection and exploitation and sexual abuse. At the same time, Uruguay acknowledges the importance of the presence of qualified human resources personnel to ensure compliance with child protection standards, and, in that connection, is concerned about reductions in personnel within some missions' mandates, especially given the increased number of registered cases in which minors have been detained on charges relating to national security, or to gather information from them. States must guarantee due process to all children detained because of their association with armed groups, while keeping in mind that children must be treated primarily as victims, who should be detained only as a last resort and for the shortest possible period, while always respecting the overriding interests of minors and the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In that regard, Uruguay reiterates that the inclusion of specific provisions for child protection must be the cornerstone of any agreement involving a cessation of hostilities or peace negotiations, and, accordingly, it welcomes the recent signing of action plans focused on children, endorsed by the authorities of the Sudan and Mali, as well as with the Civilian Joint Task Force in Nigeria. We look forward to their early implementation.

Uruguay highlights the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism established in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005) to collect and provide information on grave violations affecting children. Likewise, it reiterates the importance that the mechanism and the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflicts remain impartial and objective tools that allow initiating a dialogue on how to address such violations, prevent future violations and improve the protection of children.

Lastly, Uruguay stresses the need for the international community to continue joining efforts to improve the protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law, and reiterates its commitment to continue working tirelessly with the United Nations, all States Members and civil society to improve the situation of children in armed conflicts. All girls and boys are vulnerable, but that is especially so during armed conflicts. It is the responsibility of all of us to protect them.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation to France for its initiative in convening today's debate. I thank the briefers for their briefings. I am especially indebted to Mr. Mubin Shaikh for sharing with us his own experience and insights.

Japan associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The latest report (S/2017/821) of the Secretary-General states that the situation of children in armed conflicts continues to be grim. According to the report, in 2016 there were at least 4,000 verified violations affecting children by Government forces, and more than 11,500 verified violations by a range of non-State armed groups. Those numbers would be much greater if we were to count unverified cases. Japan is of the strong belief that the monitoring and reporting mechanism established in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005) is key to improving the situation. Without the analysis of the information by the Office of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Member States are prevented from understanding the situation on the ground and taking the appropriate measures. Japan will continue to support the activities of the Office of the Special

Representative of the Secretary-General and the child protection officers in the field.

Ten years ago, 58 countries, including Japan, adopted the Paris Principles under the initiative of France, showing our collective commitment to end child recruitment, release child soldiers and bring former child soldiers back into society. Today, regrettably, we still see children fighting on the front lines of armed conflicts. In fact, the number of child soldiers is increasing due to the rise of violent extremism and of non-State armed groups.

Children can never recover the time they spent as soldiers. It is a regrettable reality that the reintegration of former child soldiers into society is difficult due to social stigma, as children who have been forced to participate in fighting are often treated as perpetrators. Those children often lack the psychosocial support they need to successfully reintegrate themselves into society. Programmes to support those children must address their unique needs, as such vulnerable children often lack the knowledge and experience to make appropriate decisions on their own. In most cases, it is difficult to expect the States affected by armed conflicts to cope with the reintegration of children by themselves. It is indispensable that the international community support conflict-affected States through funding and sharing good practices.

In that context, Japan has been contributing to international organizations working in Africa, the Middle East and Asia to support the social reintegration of child soldiers and to protect and empower children. In the Central African Republic, for instance, approximately 6,000 to 10,000 children were part of the armed forces in 2013. By 2016, thanks to the efforts of UNICEF, 4,000 child soldiers had been liberated. Japan provided $2 million in 2015 to provide assistance to those children. Employment training was provided to approximately 1,000 former child soldiers, and about 10,000 children affected by conflicts have undergone psychological therapy. A campaign to stop sexual violence against children was carried out as well.

In the past 20 years, since the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was set, various frameworks and guidelines have been established to improve the situations of children affected by armed conflicts and to protect children from the influence of conflicts. It is with great regret that I am obliged once again to stress the importance of implementation on the ground. No child should live in fear of attacks; nor should they fight on the front lines of armed conflicts. Together with other Member States, international organizations and civil society, Japan will continue to make efforts to implement the commitments, to the betterment of the future of children all over the world.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia would like to thank France for organizing and convening this open debate. We also convey our gratitude for the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/821), to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for her briefing, and to Mr. Mubin Shaikh for sharing his life experience with us.

Murders, mutilations of children, recruitment, the use of children as human shields and suicide bombers, and denying them access to humanitarian assistance in certain situations shows the enormous challenge that States and the Organization face in dealing with the situation of children in armed conflicts. Such conflicts profoundly affect the lives of girls and boys in many parts of the world. The direct consequences of war and violence affect them to a greater extent because they suffer from psychological trauma due to the abhorrent acts that they witness or fall victim to, and are also subject to the physical consequences that affect their normal development and very often lead to their death. An example of such tragic situations can be seen first and foremost in the actions of the terrorist group Boko Haram. They involve children in violence, and their aim is to break the will of the children. Their worst crime is a kind of baptism of group violence, ceremonial sacrifice, mutilation and murder, making their reintegration into society all the more difficult, as was pointed out recently by a local newspaper.

Another case that is particularly striking is the situation of Palestinian girls and boys. According to the Secretary-General's report, 444 minors, including 15 girls, are detained in Israeli military prisons. In the east of Jerusalem there havebeen 712 documented cases of Palestinian minors detained for "security" reasons. Due to the conflict in 2016 a total of 36 Palestinian girls and boys lost their lives in addition to one Israeli girl, and 900 minors were injured. The data given in the Secretary-General's report are alarming. Clearly, the ever-growing participation of non-State actors and the employment of non-traditional methods of war are increasing the difficulty of qualifying in any detailed manner the consequences of war on children. The proliferation and expansion of armed groups, wars over natural resources that provoke and sustain conflicts, in addition to the internationalization of terrorism, are factors that have not been sufficiently combated or significantly reduced. We agree with the Secretary-General when he states that the best way to protect civilians, in this case girls and boys, is to address the root causes of conflict. For us, among those causes are war, insecurity, illicit trafficking in persons, trafficking in weapons, terrorism, regime-change policies, the race for natural resources, and socioeconomic conditions related to an unequal distribution of wealth, among other things.

Girls and boys suffer an unacceptable level of violation of their rights as parties in a conflict, as mentioned in the report. At least 4,000 verified violations have been committed by State forces and more than 11,500 by armed groups in 20 countries around the world. According to UNICEF, approximately 50 million children have been involved in armed conflicts, of which 28 million are indirectly affected by forced displacement, sexual violence, the loss of family and abandonment. In times of war and conflict the limited security leads once again to a lack of access to basic services and education and health. That is made worse by the destruction of infrastructure, schools and hospitals.

The growing number of children in armed conflicts has as a result an increase in child victims. The participation of children in hostilities is a disturbing phenomenon that to date has not been able to be completely resolved by the international community, either by the non-implementation of measures aimed at preventing conflicts or because of a lack of visible action to put an end to impunity for such crimes. In that regard, we condemn all acts committed by armed groups, including those that commit acts of terrorism, mass kidnappings, rape and other forms of sexual violence, such as sexual slavery, and all forms of exploitation.

In that regard, we should remember that various norms of international humanitarian law, including those provided for in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Protocols Additional of 1979, as well as the provisions set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, refer to the special protection that children should enjoy because of their greater degree of vulnerability. For all those reasons, we should mention as an important set of information that, of the 15 members of the Security Council meeting here today, 14 have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Bolivia would also call on all States to adhere to similarly important international instruments. Bolivia also calls on the members of the international community in general to comply with their obligations in order to protect children in armed conflicts, and thereby safeguard their fundamental rights. We would emphasize the responsibility that all States have to end impunity and to investigate those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and all such horrendous acts that are perpetrated against boys and girls.

We consider it is fundamental and urgent to design and implement tangible actions that include protection plans for girls and boys in armed conflicts, in addition to implementing programmes that will guarantee remedial measures through physical and psychological rehabilitation, an end to stigmatization and ensuring that such acts are not repeated.

We would like to end on a positive note: the end of the armed conflict in Colombia. That is something that should be stressed because of the progress made and the measures adopted by the parties to address the violations and abuses committed against boys and girls in the context of the armed conflict in that country. That includes a dialogue that involves minors in the agreements, legislative advances aimed at promoting the protection of children affected by that armed conflict and the joint coordinated work carried out with United Nations agencies.

All of those activities as a whole are goals that should guide the efforts of national Governments, the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations and all specialized institutions in the protection of girls and boys in armed conflicts.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Senegal welcomes the presence with us this morning of His Excellency Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian to personally preside over this open debate. We also commend the French delegation for organizing this high-level meeting on the very important issue of the plight children in armed conflict. This debate testifies to the dynamism of the French presidency and also displays our common commitment to the cause of protecting children.

Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General for the detailed presentation of his report (S/2017/821) on the issue at hand. The report shows the impact of armed conflicts on children and also the scope of the violations committed in 2016. This is also an opportunity to remind everyone that the protection of children in armed conflict should remain a priority in our work.

Senegal welcomes the work being done within the United Nations for the protection of children and the very active role played in that regard by the Security Council. The decisive commitment of the Council to this issue was marked in particular by the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which was a historic milestone in effectively tackling the issue of child protection. It also has enabled us to put together provisions on protection based on the following elements: first, the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children in armed conflict; secondly, national action plans adopted by the parties to a conflict in order to stop the recruitment of child soldiers or, if necessary, to expedite their release; and, thirdly, a Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Thanks to that mechanism, as well as resolutions 2272 (2016), 2286 (2016), 2331 (2016) and to the joint efforts of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, Member States, international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society, significant progress has been made in the protection of children.

While that progress is welcome, it should never obscure the persistence and scope of the violence against children in armed conflict, especially in the present environment characterized by new forms of conflict and unconventional wars. That is all the more so since the report we are considering indicates that violations against children were carried out in large numbers in 2016, with at least 4,000 violations committed by Government forces and more than 11,500 by non-State armed groups.

Even more worrying is the tendency to disregard international law, and the impact that has on children. That should compel all the actors involved in this struggle to safeguard the dignity of children, to redouble their efforts to continue to move further forward and to rise to the challenges that persist, in particular protecting children against recruitment by non-State armed groups, including terrorist groups. In that connection, we should welcome the dialogue the United Nations undertook with non-State armed groups, which resulted in particular on the signing of a new plan of action with the Coordination of Movements of Azawad in Mali to stop and prevent serious violations against children.

Ensuring effective emergency protection to all children affected by armed conflict is the primary responsibility of Governments. We believe it is important that Member States stand together in their efforts and actions, including scrupulously implementing the international rules and norms on the protection of children in armed conflict to which they have committed. In that regard, in order to ensure special protection for children in armed conflicts and create the foundation for a peaceful world by promoting the values of peace, tolerance, understanding and dialogue, Senegal has put in place a national strategy on the protection of children.

On the legal front, Senegal has acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. With regard to displaced populations, especially children, Senegal has developed a humanitarian programme that focuses on school canteens, the rehabilitation of classrooms, hygiene and sanitation, water supply, psychosocial care, mine awareness and the beginning of mine clearance. Education for peace is also increasingly becoming part of our school curriculum, and very often it is linked to civics education.

In support of the efforts of Member States, the United Nations, and in particular the Security Council, must strengthen its effort to promote all facets of a culture of preventing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, and the fight against impunity, whoever the perpetrators are, by making sure, inter alia, that United Nations resolutions are implemented.

Bolstering the role played by United Nations peacekeeping operations in this area is another important tool that the Council has at its disposal in the area of prevention. To better ensure protection for children in armed conflict, Senegal would like to reiterate its plea for better prevention, based on a reliable and rigorous early-warning system and on the basis of genuine cooperation with all the actors concerned, including regional and subregional organizations.

We would like to underscore the importance of regional partnerships and also to recall the contribution of Africa to combating this phenomenon, including the adoption, in 1996, of the Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa. The Cape Town Principles were a source of inspiration for the international community in its work to protect children, especially through the adoption of the Paris Principles, which are today a key tool in the area of protecting children in conflict.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the importance of a global approach that encompasses the political, economic, social and legal aspects of the protection of children, as well as preventive and proactive work.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to welcome you to the Security Council, Mr. President, and to thank you for presiding over today's open debate. We also thank Secretary-General Guterres and Special Representative Gamba for their briefings. We listened attentively to the representative of civil society.

Children are both the future and the hope of the world, and also its most vulnerable group. With the increasing escalation and spread of armed conflicts and terrorist activities, problems of the abduction of children and their exploitation in terrorist attacks are worsening. The displacement of children in areas in turmoil is also an increasingly serious problem, while their circumstances in relation to security, health care, education and other humanitarian problems are a continuing source of concern. The international community must take such new realities and trends into consideration and take concrete measures to protect children in armed conflicts.

We should first continue to fight terrorism in all its forms in order to keep children from harm. The international community should have zero tolerance towards terrorism, whatever the situation, and should resolutely combat crimes in which terrorist groups kill, abuse or kidnap children. The international community should take effective measures and work together to combat terrorist groups' use of the Internet and social media to spread violent or terrorism-related audiovisual content with the aim of finding recruits and inciting violent or extreme activities. Efforts should be made to ensure that children's minds are not poisoned through the dissemination of terrorist and extremist ideologies. We should pay great attention to the role of families, schools and communities in helping children fight the influence of extremist or terrorist thinking.

Secondly, we should respect the leadership of the countries concerned and create a solid basis for child protection. It is the Governments of countries in conflict that have the primary responsibility to protect their children, and therefore the key to implementing resolutions, programmes and plans aimed at protecting children lies in promoting the efforts and coordination of the countries involved. The international community should encourage those countries to take on their full leadership role and provide them with support and assistance in building their capacity for child protection while respecting their sovereignty. Through its monitoring and reporting mechanism for children in armed conflict, the Security Council should strengthen its dialogue and communication with Governments, listen to their voices and coordinate actively with them.

Thirdly, we should increase our international humanitarian assistance and provide concrete help to children affected by armed conflict. While taking an approach that respects the sovereignty of countries in conflict, the international community should uphold the principles of humaneness, impartiality and justice in ensuring that children affected by armed conflicts have access to food, health care, education and other humanitarian assistance. The United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme should strengthen their mutual coordination, while the United Nations as a whole should also improve its coordination with regional and subregional organizations.

Fourthly, we should have an integrated strategy and work to establish international synergy in the area of child protection. In post-conflict construction, attention should be given to help children suffering from the effects of armed conflicts to reintegrate successfully and to create a security and social environment conducive to their healthy development. UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank should make use of their positions to enhance coordination and cooperation and to support countries in conflict in their efforts to eradicate poverty and promote universal education and sustainable development.

China stands ready to work with the rest of the international community, and will continue to support the active efforts of the Security Council, the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, as well as to make every effort to maintain international peace and security, improve the situation of children in armed conflicts, protect children from the scourge of war and create a harmonious and stable environment for their healthy development.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the delegation of France for its initiative in convening and conducting today's meeting. We would like to also thank the Secretary-General for his participation, and we note the briefers' valuable contribution to our discussion.

We have studied the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/821) carefully and share his concern regarding the ongoing lack of respect for international law during armed conflicts. Children are particularly vulnerable in the face of such violations, and there can be no justification in cases where children or schools are deliberately targeted, or where children are recruited or used as human shields or suicide bombers in acts of terror. The international community must provide a coordinated response to such challenges.

Children also need emergency assistance in places where active fighting has already ended. In Syria, the de-escalation measures that have been established within the framework of the Astana process and the successes that have been achieved in fighting terrorism have enabled us to make significant progress on the humanitarian front. In carrying out this work, we keep children's needs front and centre. The humanitarian convoys bring food and medicine, but they also have schoolbooks and even toys. We are also organizing efforts to rebuild and rehabilitate schools and hospitals. Recently in Homs, the Russian military, which is continuing to fight terrorism in Syria at the invitation of the Government, literally raised a secondary school for 700 pupils from the ruins. In September and October alone, our doctors provided medical attention to approximately 400 Syrian children, while those who needed complicated procedures were sent to Russian hospitals. These and other efforts are being carried out against a backdrop of humanitarian disaster in the utter ruin that is Raqqa. Those responsible for that state of affairs prefer not to talk about the plight of children and attempt to distract attention from it with established ploys. We agree that the united efforts of the international community on the humanitarian front would help us get results on the ground sooner.

We support the intention of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to cooperate with Member States. Most countries affected by armed conflict are making enormous efforts to improve the situation with regard to the protection of children, but they often need help from the international community. These kinds of efforts would be a lot more effective if constructive dialogue was established with the State concerned.

This year there has been a new approach to the preparation of the report. We found the inclusion of the sections on achievements and concerns interesting. However, we have questions about the change in the format of the annexes that list the parties to the conflict that have committed violations against children. In particular, we believe that clarification is needed on the criteria used to determine who took measures to improve the protection of children and who did not. It would seem that putting parties in one category or the other does not always reflect the real situation on the ground where ensuring the safety and protection of children is concerned.

There is a whole range of standards in international humanitarian law aimed at protecting children and civilian infrastructure in armed conflict. We believe that at the moment there is no need to change or add to the existing international legal norms, including through so-called soft law guidelines. We think that what we need to do above all is focus our efforts on improving the effectiveness of our implementation of the documents we already have. We would also like to suggest that the recommendations in the Secretary-General's annual report, just like the efforts of the Security Council, should focus primarily on approaches that have been developed and approved within the framework of the United Nations.

Our delegation has traditionally supported the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict. We support maintaining its integrity and independence. We hope that in the future the efforts in this area will be based on the principles of impartiality and objectivity. In that regard, ensuring that the information in the Secretary-General's reports is accurate and reliable is extremely important. There should be no place for politicization and double standards in these matters.

As usual, we have a few words to say about the statement by the Ukrainian delegation. Their attempts to use any opportunity to spread false allegations about Russia is hardly news, and we will therefore not comment on what was said today. We are more concerned about what is going on in Ukraine, with the connivance of Kyiv's patrons, which is the authorities' establishment of totally unacceptable and openly discriminatory measures. For example, legislation is being passed that will deprive thousands of Ukrainian children whose mother tongue is Russian of the opportunity to be educated in that language, in what is clearly their punishment for the fact that their origins do not conform to Kyiv's anti-Russian policies.

With regard to south-eastern Ukraine, we would like to draw the Council's attention to the fact that since the start of a conflict initiated by Kyiv, civilian structures, including schools and hospitals, have been systematically and indiscriminately shelled by Ukrainian artillery forces. In some cases, such as that of the shelling of School No. 63 in November 2014, in which two children died, there is reason to believe that the Ukrainian army targeted the school quite deliberately. There have been many cases in which schools have been fired on, and their targeting by the Ukrainian armed forces has been documented in reports by United Nations observers and human rights activists. They also note that the Ukrainian Government's establishment of special residence permits for the area of conflict is preventing children from getting access to health care and education. Kyiv's blockade also has obvious consequences for the situation of the children of Donbas.

The future of children in eastern Ukraine and throughout the entire country is directly dependent on the restoration of peace. We are all well aware that the way to achieve that is through the implementation of the Minsk agreements. We hope that Kyiv will stop sabotaging them and finally acknowledge the importance of fulfilling the commitments it has undertaken, as well as its duty to comply with international humanitarian law.

Mr. Ali (Kazakhstan): I thank the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France for highlighting the urgent need to prevent the recruitment and use of children by non-State actors. We are very grateful to Secretary-General Guterres and Special Representative Gamba for their insightful briefings. We commend the UNICEF and Department of Peacekeeping Operations teams for their coordinated and relentless efforts to put an end to this scourge. We would also like to thank Mr. Mubin Shaikh, representing civil society, for his guidance on how to counter the radicalization of children.

The Secretary-General's road map and the change in format of his report (S/2017/821) will help to enhance United Nations engagement with the parties to conflicts and give the report a more preventive thrust. We are nonetheless deeply worried by the worsening crises around the world, including the threats posed by terrorists and violent extremist groups. In the understanding that urgent action should be taken, Kazakhstan would like to propose the following recommendations for addressing the complexity, severity and scale of violations against children.

First, we encourage all Member States to universally ratify and implement the relevant international treaties and to enact related national legislation, as well as to endorse international tools designed to promtoe the protection of children in armed conflict. I am pleased to be able to inform the Council that Kazakhstan has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, enacted a national law on children's rights and amended its criminal code to prohibit the recruitment of persons under the age of 18. We have not only endorsed the Paris Principles and Commitments, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration, we are also working actively to implement them effectively.

Secondly, we must improve the coordination of all our efforts with all the relevant parties, including Government authorities, United Nations country teams, regional and subregional organizations and non-governmental organizations. In that regard, we would like to commend the efforts of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, Save the Children and Child Soldiers International, which are making sterling contributions in defending children's rights and monitoring violations against them.

Thirdly, we must maintain the ability of the United Nations to protect children on the ground and the capacity of its missions to monitor and report grave violations of children's rights. We also need criteria related to child protection when we establish and renew the mandates of the relevant Security Council sanctions committees. The importance of protecting children should be included in peace and negotiation processes, especially with non-State armed groups.

Fourthly, we urge Member States to ensure that all measures on combating terrorism and violent extremism are implemented in full compliance with international law, that children associated with non-State armed groups are treated primarily as victims and that detention is used only as a measure of last resort.

Fifthly, protocols must be adopted for handing children over as quickly as possible to civilian child protection actors in order to prioritize their reintegration and rehabilitation. Adequate resources must be allocated to ensure children's safe access to education and training, health care, basic services and trauma counselling. In order to achieve that we should also establish a mechanism for creating systematized, long-term viable solutions.

Sixthly, every effort should be made to prevent children's recruitment or large-scale radicalization and the widespread dissemination of terrorist ideology among children and young people, including through increased Internet use. At the same time, however, given the lack of a unified approach to controlling the Internet and countering terrorist propaganda, measures to identify and block extremism on Internet sites have proved ineffective. It will therefore be important to provide interreligious and inter-ethnic education with a view to creating a national identity based on shared human values and tolerance in a global civilization. Investing in development, providing better living conditions and meeting social and economic needs are equally important in bringing stability and progress to troubled societies.

We endorse today's adoption of a presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/21), which covers a range of key issues related to the children and armed conflict agenda, and drafted by Sweden, which chairs the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

In conclusion, in Kazakhstan's view, children are our countries' most precious resource. We are therefore ready to support all collective and comprehensive measures aimed at ensuring the safety and welfare of children, who become the most vulnerable group in times of armed conflict.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We gather here every year in the Security Council to discuss the ongoing suffering of children in armed conflict. They are the group most affected by conflicts, and we have yet to find a radical solution to ending their suffering and supporting the children who are its victims.

This year's report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821) records the highest percentage of violations against children in conflict zones since the children and armed conflict agenda was first articulated. But what has the Security Council done to protect children in conflict zones? It has established a legal framework that, if implemented, will protect children. But why has that framework not been implemented, and why do children in such situations continue to suffer?

Egypt commends the new approach taken by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in ensuring that her report is not merely a tool for accusing one party or another but a tool for warning the international community of the gravity of such violations and for finding solutions that protect children in armed conflict.

In this regard, we would like to clarify the following points.

First, we welcome the positive developments noted in the report on contacts with parties to armed conflict and the positive impact of dialogue and contact with such parties on improving the situation of children in different conflict zones. We encourage the Special Representative to intensify this dialogue, especially with non-State parties, without it influencing their legal status.

Second, Egypt reiterates that Governments have the primary responsibility to protect civilians, especially children in armed conflict.

Third, we believe in the centrality of the commitment to the children and armed conflict mandate and in the need to avoid focusing on secondary or contentious issues outside of this mandate.

Fourth, we also believe that the Security Council and the General Assembly are the official international forums for drafting or amending the institutional and legal framework of the children and armed conflict agenda. We take note of the regional and international initiatives aimed at implementing this mandate but do not consider them to be a basis for action so long as they remain outside the framework of the Security Council and the General Assembly, which we would recall, originally created that mandate.

Fifth, Egypt calls on all States to address equally the six grave violations identified by the mandate and to refrain from considering any violation to be more or less important than another. Such distinctions could lead to impunity or tolerance for perpetrators and would therefore render the mandate null and void.

Sixth, we must address the root causes of armed conflicts, notably underdevelopment and the spread of poverty.

Seventh, funding for programmes aimed at the rehabilitation and reintegration of children victims of recruitment in armed conflict zones remains extremely low compared to the demand for such programmes. We call on the international community, especially the donor community, to increase these allocations.

Eighth, as we mentioned earlier, Egypt is in favour of the latest developments concerning the drafting style of the report of the Secretary-General. However, we call for putting an end to the use of double standards. The report registers violations in certain areas and list their perpetrators in its annexes. However, we also note the ongoing suffering of Palestinian children in Palestinian territory under the yoke of the Israeli occupation, and we wonder why they were not listed in the annexes to the report. We join the Secretary-General in calling on the Israeli Government to rescind its decision to put children in administrative detention as this is a violation of its international obligations, especially those under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Tenth, concerning the drafting of the annual report, in the light of the deficiencies in the methodology of the work of the United Nations in Yemen in the area of information-gathering, we call on the United Nations to review its follow-up mechanisms relating to the situation in Yemen, to open offices throughout Yemen and to rely only on credible sources in preparing reports on coalition operations.

Eleventh, we call for the addition of a section to the report focusing on parties to conflict that have been de-listed from the annexes, so as to identify best practices and lessons learned and benefit therefrom in dealing with parties that are still listed in the annexes.

The United Nations organs have put in place the necessary legal framework to protect children in time of war and in time of peace. The General Assembly has acknowledged, in its various resolutions, that children have the right to education and has called on Member States to put in place the framework necessary to provide education to children in emergency situations.

Many international instruments have stipulated the right of children to education, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Although most countries have ratified these international instruments, in most instances their content has not been implemented, with attacks carried out against schools and educational facilities in conflict zones and in the occupied Palestinian territory. They are also being used for military purposes, denying children their right to education,

We believe that the international community, especially donors, must provide the necessary financial support to States suffering from armed conflicts, especially recurrent conflicts, in order to rebuild their schools and to provide non-conventional educational services to children, including home-schooling and distance learning. Special measures must be put in place for refugee and migrant children from conflict zones to ensure that they do not drop out of school.

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants compels countries to provide basic education to refugee and migrant children. We renew our pledge to fulfil our obligations.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of Ukraine has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): With reference to the statement made by the Russian delegation, let me just recall a simple but rock-solid and undeniable fact.

The Russian Federation is recognized by the General Assembly as an occupying Power in Ukraine and by extension as a party to an international conflict. As the occupying Power and a party to a conflict or dispute, that country does not have the legal right, and especially not the moral right, to pronounce itself on Ukraine in the Council by virtue of the United Nations Charter, at least not until Russia returns Crimea to Ukraine, withdraws from the eastern part of my country and pays in full for the damage inflicted by its invasion.

The President (*spoke in French*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium.

Mr. Reynders (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to thank France for having organized this open debate. I am delighted at the presence here of Mr. Mubin Shaikh, who spoke here in New York two years ago at an event that Belgium had organized.

My country associates itself fully with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, that of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and that of Norway on security in schools.

I should like to make the following comments in my national capacity.

We welcome the publication of the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821), and I share the deep concern expressed therein with regard to the extent and gravity of the violations committed against children in 2016. It is regrettable that armed conflict has continued to affect children disproportionately — as evidenced by the United Nations-confirmed figure of 1,340 children victims in Yemen. The problem of children in armed conflict is multidimensional. I would like to mention two aspects in particular — the prevention of child recruitment by non-State armed groups and the reintegration and rehabilitation of children affected by conflicts. Both of those aspects are at the heart of the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, to which Belgium has acceded. Belgium also signed on, in March, to the Safe Schools Declaration. Children are often recruited or abducted forcefully, but some have joined non-State armed groups as a result of economic, social or security-related pressure. There must be real alternatives to children joining armed groups.

Prevention is the only lasting solution for resolving the issue of children's participation in armed conflict. It is essential that States develop prevention plans that cover all aspects of that issue. Effectively preventing the recruitment and exploitation of children requires schooling that does not put children in harm's way. In that regard, it is regrettable to see the increased impact of violent extremism on children. That phenomenon results from a context whose root causes we must work to understand if we are to effectively combat it. Our fight against violent extremism can be successful only if we address the root causes, while fully respecting human rights and fundamental liberties.

Moreover, I wish to stress the importance of reintegrating and rehabilitating children affected by armed conflict. The extreme experiences that those children have lived through often have an adverse effect on their ability to reintegrate into society. It is crucial to work together to provide them tailored long-term support.

In that spirit, Belgium and UNICEF held a parallel event yesterday on the release and reintegration of children linked to armed forces or armed groups. I thank Ms. Gamba for her active participation at that event, which is part of the follow-up to the high-level meeting that Belgium organized last year in New York — attended by our Queen Mathilde — which enabled to us to share good practices regarding the psychosocial rehabilitation and social integration of children in armed conflict. Belgium is committed to remaining active in addressing those issues.

Additionally, sharing experiences was the main goal of the Brussels conference on the subject at the beginning of this year. On that occasion, we mentioned the good practices that had been developed by various international and regional organizations on the development and implementation of child protection policies.

I join the Secretary-General in welcoming the proactive approach and contributions of regional and subregional organizations to child protection. I echo his sentiments in calling on the Council to continue to request the deployment of the necessary means to protect children in United Nations peace operations. It is essential that when mandates be reviewed, when troops are drawn down or when funding for peace operations decreases, child-protection adviser positions should not be disproportionately reduced.

The theme of children in armed conflict is one that is very close to my heart. I would like to conclude by affirming our commitment to staying the course and working even more closely with Council partners during the 2019-2020 mandate, for which we are a candidate.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Peru.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the French presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate to address an issue of key importance, given that children — the future of humankind — are one of the most vulnerable segments of our populations. They are affected in many ways by the devastation that accompanies armed conflict. We also thank Mr. Mubin Shaikh and Ms. Virginia Gamba for their valuable briefings.

Conflicts and violence severely affect the lives of children in many parts of the world. In addition to suffering the direct consequences of war and armed violence, they are also affected by displacement, loss of family members and associated trauma.

Peru highly appreciates the latest report of the Secretary-General on the subject (S/2017/821), in which he expresses his great concern about the magnitude and gravity of the violations committed against children in 2016, including murders and mutilations, recruitment and, in certain situations, denial of humanitarian access.

This debate is being held as we commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, which seek to protect children from recruitment and use by armed forces or groups and to promote their liberation and social reintegration. Peru calls on countries that have not yet done so to endorse that instrument.

Our country has been implementing various measures to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents, in line with our international obligations and commitments, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Those measures are being implemented for the sake of children in consideration of their needs and specific vulnerabilities.

Specifically, in relation to conflict and post-conflict situations, Peru has been making significant efforts to ensure that its policies, programmes and decisions focus on preventing the recruitment of children — bolstering their protection and well-being, facilitating their reintegration and promoting development based on human dignity.

Additionally, Peru has welcomed the Canadian initiative on the Vancouver principles on the maintenance of peace and the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers, which we hope will be adopted very soon.

As one of the incoming non-permanent members of the Security Council, as of 1 January 2018, my country is committed to continuing to take concrete actions to comply with the mandates established by Council resolutions on this issue.

Peru is gratified that the children and armed conflict agenda continues to occupy a central place in the work of the Security Council, alongside additional integrated efforts in the field of human rights with a view to achieving sustainable peace.

Finally, Peru wishes to reiterate its support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and for the institutions of the United Nations system that work to promote the rights of children in armed conflicts around the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the French presidency for including this issue on the agenda.

(*spoke in English*)

We warmly thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for her crucial work on this essential mandate and for her valuable contribution to the advancement of the children and armed conflict agenda. We commend her for her powerful briefing this morning. We will continue to build upon our long-standing cooperation with the Special Representative and to support a strong mandate based on a credible and effective monitoring and reporting mechanism.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and would like to make some additional remarks.

First, this year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. Over the past decade, significant progress has been achieved in establishing and improving the legal and normative framework for the protection of children in armed conflicts. At the same time, the alarming scale and seriousness of violations against children in recent years reminds us that today's agenda is still relevant. As documented in the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2017/821), boys and girls living in countries affected by armed conflict continue to be victims of widespread and unacceptable violations — and today we heard a number of concrete examples, not least from Mr. Mubin Shaikh, on how children are still impacted today. When countering violent extremism, it is important that all measures be carried out in full compliance with international law and that they protect children effectively. Violations of children's rights remain a serious concern of the whole international community. The signing and effective implementation of action plans with the armed forces and groups listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report are an essential tool to achieve concrete progress.

Secondly, Germany is committed to keeping the protection of children in armed conflict on the international agenda, including that of the Security Council. Over the past two decades, important mechanisms and tools have been developed to deal with the issue. One of those tools, resolution 1998 (2011), which was adopted under our Security Council presidency in July 2011, set standards for the protection of schools and hospitals to ensure that schools become safe spaces for children, allowing them to develop where they feel protected and sheltered. Setting standards is important, but implementation is paramount: real progress needs to be measured on the ground. We therefore urge all parties to armed conflict to stop attacks on schools and hospitals and halt the military use of schools, in accordance with international law. We intend to promote the children and armed conflict agenda if Germany is elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period 2019-2020.

Thirdly, efforts to strengthen regional networks and relationships with civil society are vital for better protecting and promoting the rights of children in conflict. For example, the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan promotes such efforts, and Germany is proud to have assumed the chairmanship of that Group last year. Cooperation with regional actors was also a focus at the Berlin workshop on children and armed conflict and women, peace and security in April. By bringing together various actors, the workshop provided a useful platform for exchanging lessons learned and good practices. We are delighted to announce that we are planning for the next workshop on that topic to take place in Berlin on 12 and 13 February 2018.

Despite the advances that have been made over the past few decades, much work remains to be done. The changing nature of conflicts, which now include violent extremism, terrorist threats and non-State armed groups, presents new challenges for the protection of children. Germany will therefore further encourage the United Nations family, as well as Member States, to continue to uphold the protection of children in armed conflict as a high priority. Germany will continue to do so as well and will remain a valuable partner in that endeavour.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Vieira (Brazil) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank France for convening this debate. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/821) and for his briefing on the subject.

Brazil associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Norway on behalf of States sponsoring the Safe Schools Declaration.

In 1996, the Security Council created the post of Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, which was the result of the realization that children were the main victims of armed conflicts. Two decades later, the commitment of the international community has resulted in a robust framework and specific tools for initiating dialogue with parties to a conflict and tackling violations against children. Nevertheless, conflicts continue to have dire consequences for children, who are deprived of even the most basic human rights. Brazil reiterates its vigorous condemnation of the recruitment and use of children, as well as all other abuses and violations.

Brazil is deeply concerned about the impact on children of asymmetric attacks by non-State armed groups. We recognize the difficulties that States face in responding to the threats posed by such groups, but interventions that do not respect international law are likely to inflict additional suffering on civilians and, therefore, help the very groups that the Governments concerned are trying to fight. Full respect for international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law must be the cornerstone of our efforts. Brazil echoes the recommendation of the Secretary-General to Member States involved in operations against terrorist groups, acting alone or in a coalition, to establish specific safeguards to protect children from violations, including by underscoring the principles of discrimination and proportionality enshrined in international humanitarian law.

We welcome the outcome that the Children, Not Soldiers campaign has achieved so far. It has created opportunities for dialogue with non-State armed groups to stop the recruitment of children. The participation of the United Nations in the talks between the Colombian Government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia is a perfect example of that.

Not only are children used in combat, but they are also exploited for sexual purposes. Once they are released, many of them suffer from serious psychological problems. Brazil underscores the Secretary-General's recommendation that they be recognized as victims. Providing them with opportunities for reintegration is, on the one hand, a moral and legal obligation and, on the other, an important foundation for establishing lasting peace.

Detention for reasons of national security is another problem that affects thousands of children in today's conflicts. It is outrageous that children suspected of belonging to armed groups are increasingly being treated as security threats rather than as victims, in particular in the context of counter-terrorism operations.

Conflicts have also led to an increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons, nearly half of whom are children. The obligations incumbent upon States of origin, transit and destination should not be abandoned under the pretext of national security. Establishing responsibility for violence against children is all too rare. The protection of children against serious crimes goes hand in hand with the fight against impunity.

Conflict prevention remains the most ethical and effective approach to protecting all civilians, including children, from the tragedy of war. In that regard, the Peacebuilding Commission has a constructive role to play in post-conflict countries in promoting policies that foster social cohesion and make children and young people less vulnerable to recruitment and violations.

Children should not be deprived of their childhood and their future. Brazil remains fully committed to efforts to that end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Ms. Mejía Vélez (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, on behalf of my Government, for convening this open debate. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his report (S/2017/821) and to welcome Mr. Mubin Shaikh and thank him for his valuable briefing this morning. My Government would also like to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her recognition of the results achieved by the Colombian State, including in her briefing. We reiterate our commitment to continuing to work together to ensure that the violations committed against children do not recur. We are sure that Mr Gamba's visit to Colombia in November will provide an excellent opportunity to go into further detail on the road map that we will engage in together.

As mentioned in the concept note (S/2017/892, annex), the complex and changing nature of armed conflict represents one of the greatest challenges for child protection. We agree with you, Madam, in recognizing that, during the 10 years since the International Conference in Paris on children involved in armed forces and armed groups, some progress has been made, despite the changing nature of conflicts. As evidenced by this year's conference, we must renew the commitment of States to combat the recruitment and use of minors by armed forces and other groups.

Regrettably, Colombia is not a stranger to that problem, owing to an internal conflict that lasted more than five decades, with which the Council is very familiar. Nonetheless, more than 20 years ago, long before other countries were facing realities like ours, we prohibited the recruitment of minors under 18 years of age into our national forces. Today, those responsible for the recruitment of minors are solely the illegal armed groups. Not only did the peace process end the conflict, it also put victims, including children who were recruited, at the centre of the process. As the Security Council can attest at first hand, over the past year 132 minors were released by the FARC and are now being protected by the State in order to have their rights fully restored.

Another important step was the establishment of the National Reincorporation Council, which endorsed the special programme entitled "A Different Way of Life". The programme features a series of special measures to reintegrate minors under the age of 18 who were released from the ranks of the FARC, and seeks to ensure that its young beneficiaries have the tools necessary to help them make new plans and rebuild their lives. It works to fully restore their rights, and compensate, reincorporate and include them in society.

There has been a clear reduction in the number of cases of recruitment over the years. Nonetheless, let us continue to work on reducing the number of cases of recruitment, with a view to ending that practice once and for all. Colombia is determined to ensure that children are not being used in armed conflict, while also working to prevent re-recruitment, with particular concern for minors of indigenous minorities and Afro-descendant communities and those in marginalized areas, through activities aimed at protecting them from all human rights violations. We are committed not only to preventing future cases of recruitment, but also to providing children and adolescents who have been released with other options. As stated earlier today by your Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Madam President, the path to reconciliation and a fair and just society must begin with children themselves and, in particular, with a focus on their education, because they are the future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Blanchard (Canada): I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, an informal network of 40 interested States Members of the United Nations, representing all five regional groups of the Organization.

The Group of Friends wishes to reiterate its strong support for the children and armed conflict agenda, for the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and for the United Nations institutions working to promote the rights of children in armed conflict worldwide.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Paris Principles and Commitments. Those foundational documents provide practical guidelines for protecting children from recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups and for assisting in their release and reintegration. We invite all Member States that have not done so to consider endorsing the Paris Principles.

We are alarmed by the number of grave violations committed against children in the past year, including attacks on schools and hospitals. Devastating in and of themselves, such attacks often have second- and third-order effects, stretching far into the future. We therefore urge the States Members of the United Nations to promote the protection of schools consistent with the relevant obligations under international humanitarian law, and to fully implement resolution 2286 (2016), which calls for the protection of medical facilities and personnel in conflict situations.

The Group remains deeply concerned about the rise in the number of armed groups employing extreme violence and their recruitment and use of children, including as suicide bombers, the abduction of children, and the systematic use of sexual violence. We recognize that violent extremism poses unique child-protection challenges. However, in our efforts to counter such groups, we must remember that children associated with them or with any other armed group should be considered as victims first and afforded the relevant protections under international humanitarian law. Furthermore, they should be detained only as a last resort and for the shortest period necessary, in full respect of international humanitarian law and applicable international human rights law. As the territory controlled by groups, such as Da'esh, is reclaimed, tailored and effective demobilization and reintegration efforts will be essential for addressing long-term harm and preventing the victimization or re-recruitment of children.

The Group appreciates the vital role played by peacekeepers in promoting child protection and welcomes the release of the new Child Protection Policy by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support and the Department of Political Affairs. We encourage all troop- and police-contributing countries to undertake concrete steps to prioritize and further operationalize child protection within United Nations peacekeeping in the training and doctrine of their national forces. Adequate resources are also needed to ensure mission success. We are therefore deeply concerned that extensive cuts to the staffing and budgets of child-protection adviser positions, as well as consolidation efforts, will undermine the ability of the United Nations to deliver on the critical child-protection mandates put forth by the Security Council.

Such capabilities also increase the awareness of grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. Indeed, a key element of the success of the children and armed conflict agenda has been the monitoring and reporting mechanism established by resolution 1612 (2005) to collect and provide information on grave violations against children, in cooperation with national Governments. The information generated through the mechanism and the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821) are important tools for fostering accountability and the compliance of parties to conflict with international child-protection standards and norms. In that regard, we welcome efforts by the United Nations to ensure that the mechanism remains impartial and objective.

The reporting on grave violations is not simply an end in and of itself, but should be seen as a mechanism to begin a dialogue on how to address such violations, prevent future violations and enhance child protection. We welcome the recent signature of action plans by Mali, the Sudan, and the Civilian Joint Task Force in Nigeria, as well as the positive cooperation of other parties on measures to address all violations and look forward to their swift implementation.

In conclusion, the Group of Friends stands ready to work with the States Members of the United Nations to move forward on this critical agenda.

(*spoke in French*)

Let me make some additional remarks in my capacity as the representative of Canada.

First, I would like to sincerely thank Mr. Shaikh for his briefing today and for his work on deradicalization in Canada and abroad.

As a Canadian citizen, I would like to underscore the presence of a Canadian hero adored by all in Canada, General Dallaire, who is here with Mr. Shaikh today.

The children and armed conflict agenda remains a key Canadian foreign policy and development priority. We are proud to be among the 105 signatories to the Paris Principles on their tenth anniversary. In February, Canada also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, reaffirming Canada's commitment to protecting civilians affected by armed conflict, in particular children, as well as protecting education as a right. The Declaration will inform the planning and conduct of the Canadian Armed Forces during armed conflict. We call upon all States Members of the United Nations to endorse the Declaration.

In March, Canada developed a national doctrine on the issue of child soldiers, the first of its kind worldwide. The Joint Doctrine Note provides strategic guidance to the Canadian Armed Forces regarding potential encounters and engagement with child soldiers. It also provides commanders with baseline guidance, through which to develop their pre-deployment training, and operational and mission-specific considerations.

The Security Council has acknowledged that the protection of children in armed conflict is a fundamental peace and security concern and has tasked specific peacekeeping missions to undertake child protection since 1999. The Blue Helmets play a critical role in addressing grave violations against children in armed conflict.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada shares the view that more can be done in a peacekeeping context to protect children affected by armed conflict, including to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers, who are prevalent in many areas where United Nations peacekeeping forces operate. In that regard, Canada has developed a set of voluntary and non-binding principles on peacekeeping and preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, known as the Vancouver principles. Those principles seek to prioritize and further operationalize child protection within United Nations peacekeeping, with a focus on preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers. They have been inspired by the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, as well as by relevant Security Council resolutions, and they were developed in cooperation with the Roméo Dallaire child-soldiers initiative, in consultation with the United Nations and the child-protection community. They were shared with all Member States last week and are to be formally endorsed on the margins of the United Nations Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial meeting in Vancouver next month.

By endorsing the Vancouver principles, Member States commit to undertake several common-sense steps to help prevent children from being used as soldiers. They include planning and training, addressing early warning signs and reporting abuses and grave violations, sharing best practices, working towards effectively preventing child recruitment, appointing child-protection focal points, ensuring the good conduct of peacekeepers, and including child protection in peacekeeping mandates, peace agreements, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts. They also address the trauma experienced by peacekeeping personnel that is related to interactions with child soldiers.

I wish to emphasize that the Vancouver principles were designed to complement, but in no way to replace, critical child-protection instruments, such as the Paris Principles, which remain a foundation of our work.

(*spoke in French*)

We invite all Member States to endorse the Vancouver principles as a concrete demonstration of our commitment to help prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to thank the French presidency for organizing this open debate, and the Secretary-General and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for their briefings.

The situation of children continues to be adversely affected by prevailing security and humanitarian challenges. We share the concern noted by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2017/821) regarding the scale and severity of the violations that continue to be committed against children in situations of conflict. Unfortunately, the changing and complex nature of conflicts has multiplied the challenges in that regard. Daunting acts and violations, such as the widespread recruitment and use of children, mass abductions, torture and sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the prevention of humanitarian access have unfortunately become patterns of behaviour in conflicts. Such acts continue to have an immense and disproportionate impact on children.

Regrettably, the international community has not been able to prevent the deaths of, and injuries sustained by, thousands of children during attacks and air strikes, which are often conducted indiscriminately on schools, hospitals, market places and internally-displaced-persons camps. Moreover, the increasing involvement of non-State armed groups and terrorist organizations in violating the basic rights of children is also a source of concern. Crimes committed by terrorist organizations, such as Da'esh and Boko Haram, must be underlined in that regard. Furthermore, other terrorist organizations, such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the Democratic Union Party and the Kurdish People's Protection Units, continue to recruit young boys and girls, even those under the age of 15, to carry out terrorist attacks. Those children are driven to their deaths by the leaders of those heinous terrorist organizations.

The international community must display joint and robust political determination and concerted action to address the situation of children in conflicts. With that understanding, Turkey continues to support the well-being of children in various emergency, conflict and post-conflict situations through its comprehensive humanitarian and development assistance programmes.

Moreover, Turkey has seen the severe impact of conflicts on children vividly in its region, especially in the eyes of the millions of displaced children. Let me share some striking figures in that regard. Turkey hosts 3.3 million displaced people who have fled to Turkey from the devastation in their countries, including 3.1 million Syrians. We are exerting every effort to overcome the growing needs of Syrian children, especially in the fields of education and health care. There are approximately 835,000 school-age Syrian children in Turkey, 508,000 of whom are able to attend school. The schooling ratio has increased twofold, and reached around 60 per cent in 2017, thanks to a robust campaign that was launched to bring those children back to school.

However, that is not enough. The establishment of new schools and the employment of new teachers are urgently needed. The education of Syrian children is of crucial importance, since they will be the ones to rebuild their country. We once again call on the international community to act in conformity with the principle of responsibility and burden-sharing in that regard.

I would like to conclude by underscoring that Turkey's unwavering support for all regional and international efforts related to the protection of children will continue.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Sparber (Liechtenstein): Liechtenstein aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The children and armed conflict agenda is sadly particularly relevant today. The ongoing erosion of the respect for international humanitarian law has a particular impact on children, as evidenced in the increasing number of attacks on children living in conflict zones and other grave violations of their rights. We reiterate our strong support for the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict. Protecting the independence and integrity of her mandate, including her reporting on violations, is crucial to its effectiveness and credibility.

The monitoring mechanism that was established by resolution 1612 (2005) to document grave violations is critical for the protection of children's rights during armed conflict. Attacks on schools and hospitals are one of the six grave violations identified under the mechanism. Such attacks have become a disturbing trend, as documented in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/821). In the past six months alone, over 500 schools were attacked. Those are just the verified incidents, and point to a probably much higher actual total number of incidents worldwide. Furthermore, the Special Representative's latest report (A/72/276) documents attacks on schools in nearly all of the countries reported on, with an alarming trend of air strikes being used as a method for attacks. Another disturbing development is the increasing use of schools for military purposes, in violation of the relevant rules of international humanitarian law.

Liechtenstein strongly condemns all attacks against schools and hospitals, as well as their use for military purposes. We urge all parties to conflict to respect the principle of distinction and other basic rules of international humanitarian law. Where the principles of international humanitarian law are violated, perpetrator accountability must be ensured. We endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and call upon other Member States, especially Security Council members, to follow suit. The right of children to an education must also be preserved during armed conflict in order to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A decade ago, the international community adopted the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups so as to end the recruitment of child soldiers. And yet, that type of recruitment continues to this day and constitutes a devastating reality for far too many children. A particularly concerning trend is the exploitation of children by violent extremists and non-State armed groups, such as Da'esh and Boko Haram. It is well documented that, among other purposes for such actions, armed forces or groups, including groups involved in violent extremism, recruit both girls and boys for sexual purposes.

Moreover, men and boys often represent the majority of detainees during armed conflict and are highly vulnerable to sexual violence. In post-conflict situations, they need our full and sustained support to be reintegrated into society. We also call on States to prosecute those who have been associated with child recruitment and violence against children, so that we can put an end to the impunity gap that persists in many conflict and post-conflict societies.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): Slovakia aligns itself with the statements that will be delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Norway, on behalf of the group of States endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration; and with the statement made earlier by the Permanent Representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, of which Slovakia is a very active member.

At the outset, I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his timely briefing and recent report (S/2017/821), covering the impacts of armed conflicts on children in 2016. Furthermore, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, for her remarkable and tireless efforts in focusing on the protection of children in armed conflict, and Mr. Mubin Shaikh for his briefing, which was much appreciated. Of course, I would also like to thank the French presidency for convening this open debate.

Slovakia is deeply committed to the protection of all children, particularly those affected by armed conflicts. We have been championing, since its adoption in 2011, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure, which has been signed by 36 States so far. Therefore, we call on other Member States to ratify the Optional Protocol, which allows individual children to submit complaints regarding specific violations of their rights under the Convention and its first two Optional Protocols.

In January, we marked the tenth anniversary of the Paris Commitments and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. A month later, in February, we marked the twentieth anniversary of the General Assembly resolution 51/77, which created a mandate dedicated to improving the protection of children affected by conflict. Those documents were pivotal in galvanizing the interest of the global community in the children and armed conflict agenda, delivering tangible and measurable results.

In the past 20 years, a tremendous amount of work has been done. Tens of thousands of child soldiers have been released and almost 30 action plans have been signed with parties to conflict, leading to a situation wherein the recruitment or use of child soldiers no longer exists in five countries where it existed earlier. But this is certainly not the end of the process. On the contrary, there is much more that remains to be done. That is confirmed clearly by the Secretary-General's report and the report of Special Representative Virginia Gamba (A/72/276). We must acknowledge that a lot remains to be done to achieve desirable results.

Less than three weeks ago, we heard the eerie testimony of Joy Bishara, one of the 276 schoolgirls kidnapped from a secondary school in the town of Chibok, in Borno state, Nigeria. The civilian character of schools is supposed to be the guarantee of their sacredness. Attacks on schools, their damage or destruction, as well as threats to, attacks on or abductions of scholars and academics undermine the right to education and have far-reaching consequences. The main purpose of those attacks is to spread fear — the fear of receiving education — because the perpetrators know that education and knowledge are cornerstones of progress.

Education helps to eliminate regional inequality. It provides tools for girls and boys alike to move forward towards a better future for their families, communities and countries. On the other hand, a lack of education increases the risk of the radicalization and recruitment of children. Their place is not on the battlefield and their tools are not bombs and firearms; they should be at their school desks with a pen and a book in their hands. That is the natural set-up for all children, and we must do our best in order to achieve that.

We urge all State and non-State parties to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. All perpetrators should be named and held accountable for violating the rights of children. That is an important step, and I would therefore like to commend the Secretary-General for providing in his report a list of the parties that have committed one or more violations against children. We should work with those parties and prepare, sign and implement action plans in order to eradicate this malpractice. We should hold recruiters, kidnappers, sexual offenders and all other perpetrators accountable in a court of law for their crimes against children. We should support the global consensus to end the military recruitment and use of children, and promote the straight-18 standard.

Last but not least, we should all engage in the release and sustainable reintegration of children following their terrible experiences of recruitment or other violations. We must keep in mind that, first and foremost, they are victims in need of specialized psychological and social assistance, and we must therefore provide them with professional help, support and education. That is the only way they will be able to resume their lives and focus on their future, without being affected by their past. Violence against children, as well as their placement or even their active role in conflicts terribly affect the children themselves, but also all humankind. After all, children are our future and we are obliged to do our utmost to provide the best possible prospects for them. If we do not, the price to pay will be high.

In conclusion, I would like to recall one of my earlier visits to Juba, in South Sudan, where we have been supporting a vaccination campaign for the children most in need — those that suffer on a daily basis and are not only poor, but truly experience hunger and are affected by it in their everyday lives. It is our obligation to children in places like South Sudan and elsewhere to do more to provide them with things that we consider normal. I would like to end by quoting former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who said,

> "Education promotes equality and lifts people out of poverty. It teaches children how to become good citizens. Education is not just for a privileged few, it is for everyone. It is a fundamental human right".

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, allow me to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821), which focuses on grave violations. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the experts for their briefing and efforts.

Since the Second World War, humankind has considered the protection of civilians an utmost priority, and adopted political commitments and legal instruments to ensure such protection. Unfortunately, as confirmed by conflicts that have followed, children remain the group most vulnerable to armed conflicts. It is difficult to explain the gap that persists, 70 years later, between the clarity of the legal obligations of States and the limitations that still hinder accountability mechanisms. We therefore echo the Special Representative's call on all States to prioritize accountability.

The State of Palestine stresses the importance of ensuring respect for international humanitarian law — notably, the principles of protection, precaution, distinction and proportionality — as well as for human rights and refugee law. It also underlines the importance of international criminal law in holding perpetrators of crimes accountable, providing justice to victims and preventing a recurrence of crimes.

The State of Palestine has joined core human rights and international humanitarian law conventions and the International Criminal Court (ICC). The State of Palestine has also acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. It has also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. In line with its policy of prioritizing the protection of children, the State of Palestine has submitted a communication to the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC on crimes committed by Israel against Palestinian children, and has mandated its newly established international humanitarian law committee to give priority to violations against children. The State of Palestine calls for universal acceptance of relevant legal instruments and commitments, leading to their full implementation.

Children must be protected from killing and maiming, recruitment and use as soldiers, arrest and detention, ill treatment, and denial of humanitarian access. The children of Palestine have been suffering for decades from a striking deficit of protection, despite our repeated calls for the protection of the Palestinian civilian population, whose rights are being violated on a widespread and systematic basis by the prolonged Israeli military colonial occupation.

Over 2,000 Palestinian children have been killed since the year 2000 by Israeli occupying forces and settlers. In 2016 alone, as documented in the Secretary-General's report, 35 Palestinian children were killed and 887 injured. Palestinian children, including in East Jerusalem, are subject to mass arbitrary arrest and detention, house arrest, incarceration, interrogation, ill treatment, sexual abuse, torture and solitary confinement. One hundred and eighty five incidents of ill treatment of children, boys and girls alike, by Israeli forces during arrest and detention are identified in the Secretary-General's report. The international community should demand the immediate and permanent release of all children from Israeli captivity.

There can be no justification for the detention and abuse of children. Moreover, Palestinian children are the most affected by the Israeli policy of forcible transfer. Deliberate attacks on schools, closures of educational institutions, the disruption of access to education, and restrictions of humanitarian and health-care access — notably due to the decade-long Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, which amounts to collective punishment — continue unabated.

Palestine reiterates that all those well-documented Israeli violations and crimes, including those identified in the Secretary-General's reports, plead clearly, according to the established criteria, for the inclusion of Israel and its settlers on the list of parties that commit grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict. The abuse of such inclusions deeply affects the credibility of the list and makes it vulnerable to criticism and claims of politicization. It should be noted that if credibility is undermined for one case, it is undermined for all cases. Moreover, we repeat our call on the international community to uphold its responsibilities and enforce international law with a view to bringing Israeli violations and occupation to an end in order to advance peace.

The State of Palestine recognizes and appreciates the important role played in Palestine by the United Nations, its agencies, programmes and funds, including in relation to the matter being addressed today, and wishes to extend its particular appreciation to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and UNICEF in that regard.

In conclusion, the situation in Palestine demonstrates the consequences of the abuse of prevention, protection and accountability, and stresses that it is only by ending impunity for violations and crimes against children that we can preserve their lives, their rights and the future they embody.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by thanking the French presidency for organizing this open debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for presenting his annual report (S/2017/821) on children and armed conflict, as well as the briefers for their valuable input.

The scale of violations committed against children reached an alarming level in 2016. International efforts to hold perpetrators accountable for crimes against children in situations of armed conflict must be strengthened and impunity must end in order to prevent new cycles of violence against children. Ensuring the full compliance of all parties with international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law must be the cornerstone of our prevention efforts.

The defeat of Da'esh, Al-Qaida and their affiliates in Syria and Iraq has been a positive development in that regard. However, we must remember that the terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, are still fully active, ravaging other parts of the world and terrorizing children. Likewise, the targeting of children on religious and ethnic grounds, such as what we are witnessing in Myanmar, is a matter of grave concern.

The Secretary-General's 2017 report reveals that the number of Palestinian children in military detention has reached the highest level recorded since 2010, with 444 children, including 15 girls. The use of live ammunition is frequently used by Israeli forces and has led to the killing of 30 Palestinian children this year. On 20 September, the world witnessed how Israeli forces continued to shoot at a 16-year-old boy in Bani Na'im after he had fallen to the ground, following initial gunshots to his legs. That is just one example of the atrocities that the Israeli regime commits on a daily basis against Palestinian civilians, including children, who resist the illegal occupation and apartheid policies of the Israeli regime. It is absurd, however, that in Palestine resistance against foreign occupation is labelled as terrorism by the occupying regime.

Yemen has entered the third year of its war, which inflicts a devastating cost on civilians. Around 15 million people lack adequate access to clean drinking water and health services. About 7 million people are faced with the threat of famine. Worse yet is that all of those have been exacerbated by the largest single-year outbreak of cholera ever recorded. That epidemic now includes over 800,000 suspected cases of cholera across 90 per cent of communities in Yemen — a country in which only 45 per cent of health facilities are functioning. The responsibility for that devastating situation falls upon the Saudi-led coalition, which seeks a military solution in place of a political settlement to the crisis.

Israel has never been blacklisted in the Secretary-General's reports, despite flagrantly targeting Palestinian children. Last year, the Saudi-led coalition was blacklisted for the first time, but surprisingly its name was removed from the list. This year, we note that the name of the Saudi-led coalition is on the list, though as an improving child-killer. We would like to take this opportunity to call for the accountability for the war crimes against children committed by anybody, everywhere. Being political and selective in such a case is tantamount to betraying the most vulnerable people on the planet, children, whom this process is designed to protect. It also discredits reports of the United Nations and seriously damages the universality of the application of international humanitarian law.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Hungary.

Ms. Bogyay (Hungary): I would like to thank France for providing us with the opportunity to reflect on this very important topic, as well as Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing. We were truly taken by Ms. Virginia Gamba's briefing.

Hungary aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union, as well as with that statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Hungary is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and is firmly committed to the protection and promotion of the rights of children, especially in armed conflicts, where they are particularly vulnerable. We have endorsed the Paris Principles and strongly encourage all Member States to do the same, in addition to endorsing other relevant international instruments.

We condemn in the strongest terms the abduction, recruitment, use, abuse, enslavement and trafficking of children, as well as targeted attacks by non-State armed groups, including violent extremist and terrorist groups, on civilian infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals. Those acts seek to terrorize communities and deprive them of their very future. Girls are at a higher risk of sexual violence and abuse, as well as of child, early and forced marriage. We condemn all perpetrators and call for holding them accountable.

Compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions is key. We should put children first. The full protection of their human rights and respect for the best interests of children should be taken into account in counter-terrorism efforts and in peace and ceasefire agreements, including their treatment as primary victims and not as perpetrators when associated with non-State armed groups. Beyond immediate humanitarian assistance, long-term assistance is indispensable, including the reintegration of children, providing them with a protective environment, ensuring their access to quality education, and addressing their specific physical and mental health needs with a view to creating the basis for transformative and durable change for society as a whole, leading to sustainable peace and stability.

In order to ensure the rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors of sexual violence, we should promote awareness-raising in communities on the criminality of recruiting children and fight against stigmatization, hand in hand with local communities, civil society, grassroots and faith-based organizations and moderate religious leaders, with a specific focus on girls. The presence of gender experts throughout post-conflict accountability and reintegration is most valuable in that regard.

Finally, recruitment through social media is an alarming emerging phenomenon. In order to prevent and reverse that trend, partnership with the private sector is indispensable with a view to disseminating information, providing first-hand examples from survivors, and creating a positive alternative to extremism. Hungary stands firm in such efforts.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Ms. Sapag Muñoz de la Peña (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are always proud to see a woman presiding over the Security Council.

We are grateful to Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, and the delegation of France for convening today's open debate in the framework of the tenth anniversary of the Paris Principles, which Chile supports. We appreciates the statements delivered by the briefers, as well as Sweden's work as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which has guided its effectiveness and direction on the ground.

Chile aligns itself with statements delivered respectively by the representative of Canada, on behalf of Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, and the representative of Panama, on behalf of the Human Security Network. Today, we will therefore refer to three priority areas: prevention and its instruments, reporting, and capacities on the ground and their resources.

We express our sorrow over the plight of victims and condemn violations committed against boys and girls in situations of armed conflict. We call on all parties, the Security Council and States to adopt measures to prevent such violations, while respecting international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, which are at the core of the preventive efforts driven by the Secretary-General. In that regard, we urge States to ratify the Option Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. We also urge States to support the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Safe Schools Declaration, which has been mentioned by many speakers. Similarly, Chile supports the Vancouver Principles on peacekeeping and the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and urges others to join that legally non-binding political commitment, which will complement the Paris Principles through practical measures that contribute to the implementation on the ground of resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions.

Yesterday, along with Canada and Uganda, we attended a sideline event on the Principles, organized by the Roméo Dallaire Foundation, and were honoured by the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba. We reiterate the importance of combatting impunity and of prosecuting and punishing the perpetrators of heinous crimes carried out against children. Where there is no such capacity or availablity, the International Criminal Court must provide justice for those crimes, in line with the Rome Statute.

We particularly underscore the recommendations outlined in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/821). We welcome the signing of new action plans, which are the most effective mechanisms of consensus to ensure the cessation of severe violations and prevent their recurrence, over any other practical measures implemented by parties to armed conflict.

With regard to the modification of the report that divides the list into two sections — one with parties to armed conflicts that have implemented measures to improve the protection of children and another with parties that have not done so — the results of their implementation should be assessed in the next report of the Secretary-General. Action plans should remain the primary measure for removing parties from the list. That will ensure transparency and equal treatment with respect to all perpetrators. We stress the value of action plans.

In terms of timeliness, we support the publication of reports in May of each year in a way that effectively contributes to action. It is essential that the relevant Office has the necessary personnel to do so. In that context, we reiterate our support for Ms. Gamba's Office, and call for the necessary human resources to be made available in order to complete that task of documentation.

Another matter of concern is capacity on the ground. We urge the Council to guarantee the deployment of staff specifically dedicated to child protection in peacekeeping operations and political missions and to ensure that associated budgets serving the best interests of the child are at the centre of decision-making when it comes to establishing or renewing mission mandates, without subjecting them to short-term financial parameters.

Finally, Chile recognizes the irreplaceable role of the Special Representative. We stress the need to preserve its independence in pursuing its thematic objectives in accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council and the particular needs of children in situations of conflict. We extend our recognition to the staff of the United Nations and to civil society for the determined work they do to protect children affected by conflicts pursuant to the Council's agenda.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Head of the Human Rights and Social Affairs Section of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Whitely: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

We warmly thank today's briefers, in particular the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba, to whom we lend our full support. We also thank the French presidency of the Council for organizing today's debate.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has strengthened the obligations for our States to make progress on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, including on eliminating all forms of child labour and the recruitment and use of child soldiers. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821), which shines a light on gross violations of child rights and the dire condition of children in many conflict situations. The annual report plays a crucial role in providing us with verified and impartial information collected through the monitoring and reporting mechanism.

We welcome the commitment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to enhancing engagement with Member States with a view to preventing violations before they occur. The European Union stands ready to support her in her efforts.

Earlier this year, we marked the twentieth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 51/77, which created the mandate on children and armed conflict. Since then, we have seen significant progress in the protection of children in conflict situations. Since 2000, more than 115,000 child soldiers have been released, 29 action plans have been signed with parties to conflict, and the Security Council has adopted 11 resolutions on children and armed conflict. There have been 167 ratifications of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. Recent success stories include the two new action plans in Mali and the Sudan, and the release of significant numbers of children in the Central African Republic and in the Philippines.

Despite this progress, the Secretary-General's report highlights some very worrying trends. Children continue to be exposed to an unacceptable risk of killing and maiming, with an alarming increase in child victims in a number of conflict situations, while in some country situations the recruitment and use of children has considerably worsened. We strongly condemn the use of abhorrent tactics of warfare by a number of parties to conflict, including forcing children to be suicide bombers. The denial of humanitarian access to children has also been highlighted as a worrying trend in the Secretary-General's report.

The EU is committed to preventing and responding to these violations. At the end of last year, the EU began the implementation of selected projects in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory targeted at children associated with armed forces and groups and children affected by armed violence, supporting efforts to secure their release and ensure their comprehensive and successful reintegration into societies through long-term interventions, but also working on preventing their recruitment and use.

In his latest annual report, the Secretary-General documents attacks on schools in almost all countries on the children in armed conflict agenda, with 753 incidents verified in 2016 alone. The EU condemns such attacks, which are incompatible with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and which also exacerbate the barriers to education that exist in conflict-affected countries.

The EU is deeply concerned by the continued practice of the use of schools for military purposes, which not only puts students and teachers in danger by turning schools into military targets, but also hinders access to education, causes damage to school infrastructure and lead to interruptions of classes. Education is a key component in preventing the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, offering safe spaces for children displaced by conflicts.

The EU attaches great importance to the protection of the right to education and the provision of safe, inclusive and quality education in conflicts. Up from 1 per cent in 2015, the EU's commitment to education in emergencies has reached 6 per cent of the humanitarian-aid budget in 2017 and will increase to 8 per cent in 2018, significantly above the global average. EU humanitarian funding has supported the education of over 4.7 million children in 50 countries.

Girls' right to education is particularly affected in times of conflict as their schools are often directly targeted by attacks. Even when schools are operating in situations of armed conflict where girls' enrolment rates were high prior to the conflict, some parents prevent girls from going to schools due to insecurity or because the facilities are being used by armed actors. Girls are also significantly affected by the recruitment and use of armed forces and groups, with some estimates indicating that as many as 40 per cent of children associated with armed forces or armed groups are female. Given these additional challenges for girls, the EU focuses on ensuring that the specific obstacles to education of girls in emergencies are taken into account in its activities and programming. Girls should no longer constitute the invisible side of reintegration programmes for children released from armed forces and groups.

Birth registration plays an important role in protecting children under 18 years of age from unlawful recruitment by armed forces and groups. Following an initial pilot programme, the EU has committed €4 million to UNICEF for a regional programme in Africa on strengthening birth-registration systems, which adds to the numerous projects the EU is supporting to strengthen national services for civil registration and vital statistics as a matter of good governance.

It is also important to ensure that recruiters of children in armed forces and groups are held accountable for their acts and face justice. We must expand our efforts for the construction of robust justice systems aligned with international standards in all countries, protecting children and preventing violations of their rights. We must ensure a better access of children to justice with stronger juvenile-justice systems.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Charwath (Austria): Austria aligns itself with the statements made by the observer of the European

Union and the representative of Canada the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. We also align ourselves with the statement to be made by the representative of Panama on behalf of the Human Security Network.

We would like to thank France for convening this open debate and the Secretary-General for briefing the Security Council. He has our full support in his efforts to ensure the accuracy of United Nations reporting on grave violations committed against children. We highly appreciate the committed work of the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict and her Office, UNICEF as well as the civil-society organizations specializing in this topic. While we have seen some positive developments, protecting children in situations of armed conflict has to stay a constant and evolving endeavour. I would like to highlight three points.

First, with regard to non-State actors, some 29 action plans with parties to a conflict have been signed to end grave violations. We have to further promote the work with both State and non-State actors so as to follow up on their implementation and to conclude new action plans. Austria recognizes the diverse challenges to engagement when it comes to responding to and preventing violations committed by non-State armed groups and stands ready to support the Special Representative in facilitating the dialogue.

We are deeply concerned about the targeted recruitment and use of children by non-State armed groups, including violent extremist groups. Under its Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2017, Austria has identified young people and the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism as one of its key priorities. A series of subregional workshops were held on young people and preventing violent extremism for the Black Sea region, the Western Balkans and Central Asia, where young men and women were able to share their experiences and provide policy recommendations.

Secondly, with regard to detained children, children allegedly associated with non-State armed groups are too often perceived as a security threat and perpetrators, rather than as victims of grave violations. Therefore, putting in place alternatives to detention and prosecution is a top priority. At the same time, monitoring and reporting on the detention of children, based on their association with armed forces or groups, needs to continue. In that regard, we would like to recall the United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, which were adopted as General Assembly resolution 69/194.

Austria also actively supports the global study on children deprived of liberty and its goals of raising awareness for children in detention around the world and of bridging the data gap on the number of children detained. Children in armed conflict who are detained for their association with armed forces or groups are one area of the study, and we encourage other States Members to lend their support to producing a meaningful study outcome.

Thirdly and lastly, with regard to tools and capacity-building, we also encourage other States to sign and comply with the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, and endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Political commitments have to be accompanied by initiatives to support practical work on the ground. Therefore, we welcome measures to improve the training of peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel to deal comprehensively with situations involving children.

Austria has been supporting the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in developing training materials on child protection for military peacekeepers and in hosting train-the-trainer courses for troop-contributing countries. Austria currently hosts a two-week train-the-trainer course aimed at operationalizing newly developed training materials on the protection of civilians and child protection. We will continue to offer our expertise and national infrastructure for that purpose.

Last but not least, we would like to emphasize the importance of deploying child protection advisers to United Nations missions. Child protection advisers play a crucial role not only as the focal point of contact within the mission, but also in reaching out to all stakeholders responsible for children's rights, as well as often monitoring the implementation of action plans.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Mr. Braun (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank the French presidency for organizing today's important debate, as well as all the participants for their contributions, in particular Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Luxembourg fully aligns itself with the statements made by the Head of the Human Rights and Social Affairs Section of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and the statement to be made by the representative of Norway on behalf of the countries that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration.

For more than 20 years, the United Nations has worked tirelessly on the implementation of a mechanism for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. Despite the undeniable success achieved demonstrated by tens of thousands of children's release and reintegration into their families and schools, year after year we note that serious violations affecting children's basic human rights persist at an alarming level in conflict zones and countries virtually throughout the world. In his report (S/2017/821), the Secretary General emphasizes the scale and severity of violations committed over the past year, which have involved an alarming level in the killing, maiming, recruiting and using of children, and denying them humanitarian access.

We must continue our tireless efforts aimed at condemning the recruitment and use of children by all parties to conflicts, including armed groups and State actors; the denial of humanitarian access, which has devastating for children; attacks on schools and hospitals; the detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups; and the use of children as human bombs and shields. We reiterate our unequivocal support for the mandate of the Special Representative, who is working tirelessly to protect children in armed conflict. The independence of her work — in particular with regard to the listing of all perpetrators of serious violations identified by the monitoring and reporting mechanism established in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005) and included in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report — cannot be called into question. We count on everyone to respect it.

We encourage all States Members that have not yet done so to endorse the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

In order to confront the trend in the arrest and detention of children on security charges, which deprive them of their fundamental rights and guarantees, we believe that children associated with armed groups, including those espousing violent extremism, must be treated as victims who are worthy of the full protection of the their human rights. The release and reintegration of children are a continuous, complex and long-term challenge that is crucial to breaking the cycle of violence and ensuring sustainable peace and security. From the very outset of any peace process or agreement, specific provisions relating to the needs of children must be ensured. We reiterate our desire to see child protection advisers continue carrying out their specific mandates independently in United Nations peacekeeping operations and political missions. The necessary resources must be made available to enable the implementations of the crucial Security Council mandates aimed at protecting children.

Together with Switzerland, Luxembourg is supporting a United Nations University research project, in partnership with UNICEF, that will help develop tools so as to better guide the work of United Nations personnel in the field and, consequently, protect and disengage children from extreme violence, while at the same time focusing on prevention. A report on that research project will be submitted early next year.

Lastly, Luxembourg will continue its financial and political support for the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General, as well as the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Hattrem (Norway): I am speaking on behalf of the group of 37 States endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration. The list of countries aligning themselves with this statement is included in a written version.

The Safe Schools Declaration is an intergovernmental, political commitment supporting the protection and continuation of education in armed conflicts. That includes a pledge to use the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Since the first International Conference on Safe Schools, held in Oslo in May 2015, 70 States have endorsed the Declaration. Education is a human right and precondition for development. Continued access to safe education is essential and helps protect children from the impact of armed conflict. It ensures that no generation become lost, and greatly contributes to a country's ability to recover from conflict. Attacks on schools not only deprive girls and boys of learning opportunities, but can put them at risk of injury and death, and increase the risk of recruitment, forced labour, sexual abuse and child and forced marriage.

We take note of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821). We convey our deep concern about the ongoing grave violations against children in conflict. We are particularly concerned about attacks and threats of attacks on schools, teachers, and students, which are occurring in too many countries. We welcome the Secretary-General's recognition that endorsing and implementing the Safe Schools Declaration is a positive step towards improving the protection of children. Moreover, we support the observation, made by the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict in her presentation of the annual report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, that the increasing support for the Declaration reflects a growing international consensus that preventing the military use of schools is essential to avoiding disruption to education.

The Safe Schools Declaration provides a framework for action and cooperation to increase the protection of education during armed conflict. It includes commitments to improving reporting and data concerning attacks on education facilities, providing assistance to victims of attacks, and developing conflict-sensitive approaches to education. States also commit to investigating allegations of violations of applicable law and to prosecuting perpetrators, where appropriate. At the Buenos Aires Conference on Safe Schools in March this year, representatives of more than 80 States discussed those important issues. Ministries of Defence, Education and Foreign Affairs and members of armed forces shared their experience and expertise in a bid to find constructive solutions. Representatives of endorsing States outlined concrete steps that they have taken to implement the commitments contained in the Declaration.

We call on all States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and to benefit from the exchange of positive experiences of its implementation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of El Salvador.

Mr. Jaime Calderón (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): El Salvador is grateful to France, as President of the Security Council, for organizing this important debate focused on children and armed conflict. We express our commitment to the Council's work on this agenda item. We also take note of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821).

As a country that overcame an armed conflict through negotiation, El Salvador is a faithful defender of the commitment to peace and development. The major progress achieved since that historic milestone in 1992 in terms of democracy, the promotion of, and respect for, human rights, and the consolidation of State institutions have contributed to building stable and lasting peace for the people of El Salvador. That is why we recognize and underscore the importance of protecting children in armed conflict, especially through compliance with the international framework of human rights, international humanitarian law and international standards for child protection.

The promotion, protection and full enjoyment by children and adolescents of their rights are a priority to El Salvador. We have therefore made major achievements in terms of the rights of the child and adolescents, especially in the areas of education, health and protection. We commend the work of the Organization to facilitate and encourage dialogue on child protection through various campaigns that have included, in specific cases of negotiation, the issue of child protection as an important point to be included in peace agreements.

El Salvador has made a commitment those who suffered as children during the internal armed conflict in the 1980s. As a result, we have made progress in developing legislation and institutions to protect children, including signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. El Salvador also recognizes that respecting and ensuring human rights are essential pillars to establish a true rule of law. As a result, we have made a serious commitment to prevent, locate and identify disappeared persons, especially boys and girls, as well as to support the families of disappeared persons, investigate cases, punish those responsible and provide comprehensive reparations to the victims and their families.

El Salvador has recognized the rights of families to know the whereabouts of children that were disappeared during the armed conflict. To that end, since 2010 El Salvador has in place a national search commission for children disappeared during the internal armed conflict. That commission investigates, locates, contacts and reunites disappeared children with their biological families. They also provide psychosocial support to families who are victims of forced disappearances. From its establishment through December 2016, the commission has recorded 295 cases and concluded 34 per cent of the investigations.

Furthermore, in October 2013 we set up a reparations programme for victims of grave human rights violations that took place in the context of the internal armed conflict, including the enforced disappearance of individuals. We also created a council responsible for the registry of victims of grave human rights violations that took place in the context of the internal armed conflict. El Salvador is promoting the establishment of a State database of genetic profiles for the localization of disappeared girls in the internal armed conflict. All of that is in line with El Salvador's initiatives at the United Nations, such as declaring the date of 24 March as the International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims, established through General Assembly resolution 65/196.

Turning to the Secretary-General's report on children in armed conflict, we urge the Security Council to request that personnel specifically dedicated to child protection be included in peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, in accordance with the provisions of the new version of the Organization's policy to protect children in its peacekeeping operations, in order to make child protection a cross-cutting issue, enable a dialogue on action plans and free and reintegrate children into society. Likewise, and since this is a topic where the link between international humanitarian law and implementing human rights is undeniable, we would like to reiterate our support to the process facilitated for some years now by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva for the swift establishment of an effective follow-up mechanism when it comes to the application of international humanitarian law. We call on all countries to demonstrate a constructive attitude for such a timely process.

Lastly, El Salvador has recorded major achievements in terms of rights of the child in various areas, while at the same time we continue to seek solutions to current challenges. Those achievements not only respond to the mandate of adapting our national legislation to the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also include the taking of specific steps to shift towards a paradigm for comprehensively protectiing children and adolescents.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to thank you, Madam President, for having convened this open debate on children and armed conflict. I also commend you for your deft stewardship of the Security Council this month.

We commend the role of the United Nations in sparing children from suffering the horrors of armed conflict. We are greatly pained at seeing millions of children exposed to violence throughout the world and becoming victims of wars for which they bear no responsibility. The report submitted by the Secretary-General (S/2017/821) refers to grave violations against the rights of children perpetrated by terrorist groups such as Da'esh, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and others. Children are murdered, recruited, exploited, subject to sexual abuse and used as human bombs; while schools, hospitals and civilian infrastructure are also targeted. The report categorically condemns the forces of the Syrian Government as well as the Myanmar border guards and others for having perpetrated such heinous and horrific crimes.

We unreservedly condemn the grave violations of international rules and regulations pertaining to the protection of children perpetrated by the Israeli occupation through its security apparatus, which uses excessive and extrajudicial force against children. Children are subject to summary executions, trials before military tribunals before reaching the age of legal responsibility, arbitrary arrest, physical torture, psychological abuse and sexual exploitation. We furthermore condemn other practices by Israeli forces, including the demolition of homes, expulsions, forced evictions, attacks against schools, creating an environment of violence and terrorism, and attacks against hospitals and health-care centres, which paralyse medical services. We call for the Government of the Israeli occupation to be held criminally responsible for those grave violations in the occupied Palestinian territories. We also call upon Israel to immediately release all detainees and prisoners, including children, and to put an end to the murders, maiming, abductions and exploitation. We are surprised to note that the report of the Secretary-General fails to mention relevant recommendations to tackle such violations.

The report mentions the war taking place in Yemen following the seizure of power by the Houthi rebels and their allies in a coup 'détat, which the international community rejected and the Security Council condemned in resolution 2216 (2015). The rebels have been identified as responsible for what is occurring in Yemen. They were called upon to immediately withdraw from the cities they have occupied, to turn over their heavy weapons to the State and to engage in a peaceful political transistion process under the auspices of the Gulf Cooperation Council and with the participation of the United Nations.

The report furthermore confirms the responsibility of the Houthi rebels and their allies in the recruitment of children, children who are being pushed into the flames of the fighting, where hundreds leave their lives, includingin in the wake of the arbitrary artillery fire that occurs throughout Yemen. Rebel Houthi militias have exploited children. They have recruited thousands and used them as human shields. Millions of children are deprived of education. They use civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, to conceal military equipment. They have made them staging grounds for bombing densely populated cities. Thousands of landmines were laid, which cause a high toll of civilian casualties, including significant numbers of child casualties. The militias have also attacked the borders and territoriy of Saudi Arabia, with approxiamtely 30 ballistic missiles manufactured in Iran launched against Saudi towns and villages.

Turning to the operations of the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, like other coalition forces, have respected the rules and principles of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The has coalition adopted clear rules of engagement to protect civilians, including full respect for the two principles of proportionality and distinction. The coalition's operations take place in line with the notion that all regions in Yemen are civilian unless there is proof to the contrary. The coalition seeks to provide protection for all civilians, particularly medical teams, medical facilities and media teams. All operations of the coalition forces in Yemen are consistently being reviewed, particularly to determine military targets and to take corrective measures as necessary.

Saudi Arabia takes very seriously all allegations of civilian victims. Saudi Arabia, as well as the coalition forces, in February 2016 set up a joint team for the assessment of incidents and to investigate all allegations of civilian victims. The team includes officers, international humanitarian law rights experts, weapons experts and other specialists. The committee is an independent mechanism that comprehensively reviews operations according to international law. It has completed investigations into 37 incidents, adopted the necessary recommendations and announced the results of the investigations. Investigations are also ongoing in 13 cases.

Saudi Arabia is persuaded that the natural place for children is in school, behind desks, in gardens, in parks and among their families. On that basis, Saudi Arabia adopted an initiative, jointly with civil society organizations in Yemen, to launch a project for the rehabilitation of children who were recruited by Houthi militias. The project consists of awareness-raising programmes, educational and psychological programmes, based on the local environment. I think that everyone here is capable of comparing the two images that I will now show the Council. This image shows children who, according to Houthi militias, are fighting alongside them — and, in fact, they say that with pride. This other image is one of children who are no longer fighters. Those children are now students, thanks to a programme of the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Assistance.

Our pain is tremendous. When a child suffers, regardless of where in the world, one victim as a result of armed conflict is a victim too many. But it behooves us to note that the report of the Secretary-General mentions a decrease in the number of victims among children — 50 per cent lower as compared to the figure for 2015 — thanks to the efforts of coalition forces. The report further notes the measures that were adopted by the coalition to limit child victims, for example, clear specific rules of engagement and measures to avoid civilian targets, accountability in the event of error, and, lastly, the establishment of a special unit responsible for the protection of children at the level of the military command of the coalition.

However, we categorically repudiate the figures and statistics mentioned in the report with respect to child victims attributed to the coalition. The mechanism that was recommended in resolution 1612 (2005) has not been respected. Members of the coalition were unable to participate with regard to the information that led to those figures. The sources for these figures are in fact individuals and organizations located in areas controlled by the rebels. There are no effective measures to verify the credibility and accuracy of the information. We expect that, given the cooperation and collaboration by the coalition — and that was mentioned in the report — such cooperation will be reciprocated, and that the mechanism will be respected so that independent observers, affiliated with the United Nations, can take part so as to ensure that the coalition will be informed about facts and incidents, so as to safeguard the integrity and credibility of the United Nations.

This report includes gaps with respect to details as to coalition operations in Yemen. Just this month, we hosted a United Nations technical team that visited the coalition command centre, the unit responsible for the protection of children, the joint team for the evaluation of incidents and the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Assistance. They were invited to discuss the best ways to protect children. The technical team also provided training assistance to those in charge of the child protection unit so they can deliver on their duties in a more effective and professional manner.

My country's delegation underscores that the best solution to protect children is without a doubt the establishment of an environment conducive to lasting peace, preventing conflicts, ending all forms of occupation and fully upholding international humanitarian law and international human rights law, so as to protect civilians and children and ensure that those who violate such principles can be held accountable.

We call upon the Secretary-General to work towards achieving those goals, as well as to revisit the report so as to guarantee its credibility, objectivity and evenhandedness.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the observer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Mr. Dornig: At the outset, allow me to join previous speakers in commending the President for organizing this timely debate and for providing us with a concept note (S/2017/892, annex) that outlines the increasing threats posed by contemporary warfare on children.

NATO recognizes that protecting children from the effects of armed conflict is both a moral imperative and an essential element to break cycles of violence. If we are sincere about protecting future generations, we must recognize the vital role of Member States and international, regional and subregional organizations in implementing Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict. Over the past five years since this subject was first addressed, at the 2012 NATO Summit meeting in Chicago, the Alliance has developed practical, field-oriented measures to address violence against children.

We have developed our standing operating procedures so that our troops now have a more robust tool to monitor and report on the six grave violations against children whenever they encounter them in NATO military operations. The information collected can be shared with the United Nations. We thereby hope to inform advocacy and activities on the ground to better protect children.

We also recently revised and expanded our predeployment training on children and armed conflict for our Resolute Support Mission personnel in Afghanistan. In partnership and cooperation with the United Nations, we are currently revising our online training course to include recent developments in the field of child protection.

We are witnessing daily the plight of children affected by armed conflict in Afghanistan, as every third civilian casualty there is a child. The United Nations continues to document cases of recruitment and the use of children by armed groups, while attacks on schools and hospitals pose a serious security risk to children and impede their access to education and health care. Sexual violence against children continues to occur, which, in the case of the sexual exploitation of boys, is particularly through the practice of bacha bazi. Working in this complex and challenging environment, NATO has sought to integrate child protection in its Resolute Support Mission operations by undertaking the following steps.

First, we established the position of senior child protection adviser in April 2016, thereby ensuring that the protection of children is prioritized within Resolute Support Mission leadership.

Secondly, we have developed a training course on human rights, including on children and armed conflict. With the support of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), training was provided to the top 120 leaders from the Afghan Ministries of Defence and Interior Affairs. In partnership with UNAMA's child protection team, we supported the Afghan Ministry of Defence in developing a child protection policy to ensure adherence to national and international child protection obligations.

Thirdly, we have taken measures to protect children across Afghanistan. Child protection focal points have been established in our Train Assist and Advice Commands (TAACs) across the country. The focal points are tasked to mainstream children and armed conflict topics within the TAACs command structures, to monitor and report when grave violations against children are observed, including incidents of sexual violence affecting both girls and boys, and to provide in-theatre briefings and trainings.

NATO remains firmly committed to the full and effective implementation of resolution 1612 (2005), as well as subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict. Close cooperation and partnership with the United Nations is imperative in that regard, and we look forward to continuing our work with the Office of the Secretary General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in order to establish a sustainable child protection architecture within NATO. We hope that these results may inform similar processes within other regional and subregional organizations, and thereby contribute to the wider international effort to help to better protect children affected by armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Archbishop Bernardito Cleopas Auza, Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza: The protection of children in armed conflict is a grave universal concern, for which the Holy See thanks the French presidency for having convened this debate. The 2014 Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2014/339) defined that year as the worst one ever for children affected by armed conflict. The situation got worse, as the data contained in the 2015 report (S/2015/409) showed that the number of children caught up in armed conflicts, as well as the scale and severity of violations, surpassed those of 2014. In brief, the reports left no doubt that the impact on children of our collective failure to prevent and end conflict was severe.

The Secretary-General's 2017 annual report, covering the year 2016 (S/2017/821), sadly points out that the worsening trend continues, as the number of children severely impacted by armed conflicts in many countries was the highest ever recorded. Violations include, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, the recruitment of children as child soldiers and suicide bombers, the abduction and selling of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, the denial of access to children of humanitarian aid, as well as attacks or threats of attacks against personnel protecting children. We condemn all those heinous crimes in the strongest possible terms,

The fact that such crimes are rampant points to a very wide gap that remains between provisions already in place and their implementation. Respect for international humanitarian law and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict can go a long way towards narrowing and eventually closing this gap.

My delegation wishes to highlight the very disturbing fact that the verified number of victims mistreated by non-State groups is three times higher than those by Government forces. This fact poses serious challenges to stopping the perpetrators who operate outside every rule of law and to holding them accountable for their heinous acts.

Another deeply disturbing trend is that of the increasing attacks on densely populated areas. Urban centres have become battlefields, where schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure are not spared, but targeted as a tactic of war. The obligation to respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution is even more pressing. Resolution 2286 (2016), on the obligation under international humanitarian law to respect and protect medical and humanitarian personnel, their equipment and means of transport in situations of armed conflict, must be observed by all the parties to a conflict.

During his recent visit in Colombia, Pope Francis said that we can never accept that suffering children are mistreated, that they are denied the right to live out their childhood peacefully and joyfully, that they are denied a future of hope. We all have the duty, according to everyone's responsibilities and possibilities, to take concrete measures that could better safeguard or save the lives of children caught up in armed conflict. At Government level, one such measure would be to treat children involved in armed conflict primarily as victims, rather than combatants, and to hand them over to civilian child protection actors who would provide for their reintegration. At the grassroots level, some of most useful measures would be initiatives to safeguard children from being recruited or abducted and programmes to help rehabilitate survivors and reinsert them in their respective families and communities.

The Holy See and many Catholic institutions and organizations throughout the world continue to be fully engaged in such initiatives. In that regard, my delegation fully supports the Secretary-General's recommendation for the establishment of long-term multi-year mechanisms for the reintegration of recruited and used children. No child's tragic story ends with his or her release from captivity. The welcome of the family and the community at large is vital to his or her reintegration and full recovery. There is one indispensable and effective way to root out acts of violence against children in armed conflict: the way of peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Ms. Kuret (Slovenia): Let me begin by thanking France for organizing this open debate ,and the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2017/821). We wish to congratulate Ms. Gamba on her appointment as Special Representative, and we express Slovenia's strong support for her mandate. My delegation would like to particularly thank Mr. Shaikh for his testimony this morning.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union, the statement delivered by the representative of Panama on behalf of the Human Security Network and the statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. We would like to make some additional remarks in our national capacity.

Progress has been made since the issue of children and armed conflict was put on the United Nations agenda. However, the situation of children is still alarming. Reports on the plight of children affected by different armed conflicts around the world must serve as a call to action. We share concerns about the scale and severity of the violations committed against children in the period covered by the report. The alarming level of killing and maiming, recruitment, sexual violence, abduction and denial of humanitarian access is highly disturbing. We agree with the recommendations of the Secretary-General that any engagement in hostilities and responses to threats to peace and security must be conducted in full compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. In that regard, we join in calling on all Member States that have not yet done so to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

Stronger steps should be taken to address accountability and end impunity for such violations. Monitoring an accurate and timely reporting in that respect is crucial to ensure that the perpetrators can be held accountable. The monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, established in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005), is therefore a key mechanism of the United Nations child protection mandate.

Children in armed conflict should primarily be treated as victims. It is important to efficiently and sustainably address the short-, medium- and long-term impacts of armed conflict on children in an effective and comprehensive manner. It is therefore essential to address their well-being as a whole and to ensure their development and future.

Slovenia has always been very active in assisting victims of armed conflict and remains committed to easing the pain of children affected by armed conflict, including by providing medical assistance and rehabilitation. In recent years, well over 500 children were rehabilitated in Slovenia. Social rehabilitation training for preschool and school counsellors and the mine-risk education programme are just two examples shown to be of great importance in strengthening the overall well-being and development of children affected by conflict. Our commitment was reaffirmed a month ago when the Slovenian Parliament adopted a new resolution on international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, with assistance in armed conflict, especially for children, being one of the priority areas.

Finally, the issue of children and armed conflict is a cross-cutting one that needs a comprehensive approach where human rights, security and development go hand in hand. It is our common duty to do our utmost to prevent children from suffering. In that regard, we urge the Security Council to continue addressing the issue of children and armed conflict and to seek the most effective means to improve their situation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): First of all, allow me to express my appreciation to the President for convening today's open debate on children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/821), as well as Ms. Gamba and Mr. Shaikh for their insightful briefings.

The international community has made important strides in ensuring that children have the best start in life. The implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, the Paris Principles and Paris Commitments, the UNICEF Children, Not Soldiers campaign and the Security Council's various tools and mechanisms have provided us with important momentum.

However, as we have heard today from many delegations, thousands of children continue to be subjected to violence at an early stage in their lives. Some, unfortunately, do not survive. Even if they do, theoe vulnerable victims must overcome their own internal battles. We are deeply concerned about the grave situation in many conflict areas that affects children, and we are also concerned about the many reports that show worsening trends in that regard.

As one of the pathfinder countries in the global efforts to protect children from violence and exploitation, Indonesia believes that it is imperative for us to take a comprehensive approach to identify real actions to address the impact of armed conflict on children. Ending violence against children cannot be done with silo or sporadic approaches; it requires comprehensive social, economic and political approaches, as well as the formulation of a long-term strategic plan and an effective legal framework. At this juncture, I would like to share Indonesia's views.

First, we must condemn, in the strongest terms, all violations and abuses committed against children in armed conflict. We urge States and other parties engaged in armed conflict to stop violence against children, including the recruitment and use of children in such conflict. Attacks on schools and hospitals, detainment by the occupying Power, child abductions, torture, the loss of caregivers, psychological and physical trauma, forced recruitment and denied humanitarian access are also unacceptable and the perpetrators should be held accountable.

Secondly, integrated and comprehensive solutions are urgently needed to address the issue of protection of children in armed conflict, particularly girls as part of the women and peace and security agenda. We also urge the speedy and full implementation of the action plans designed to end violations against children. Indonesia also urges that actions to address the impact of armed conflict on children include the formulation of a long-term strategic plan for reintegration and rehabilitation.

Thirdly, we should place special emphasis on the reintegration of children into otheir families and societies. Reintegration programmes should be in perfect synchronization with education to ensure that children can regain their missing education. Reintegration and education programmes should also pay particular attention to children separated from their families, as well as children with disabilities.

Fourthly, we must to promote more intensive cooperation among subregional, regional and international organizations by sharing best practices and lessons learned, strengthening law and regulations and by enacting and adopting region-specific instruments and frameworks for protecting children in armed conflict. We also support efforts made by the United Nations to raise awareness.

Indonesia is committed to ending violence against civilians in armed conflict, particularly women and children. We are firm believers that the United Nations should play a more significant role through its peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities. In that regard, special attention should be given to the plight and safety of children. Indonesia's Peacekeeping Centre in Sentul, West Java, has thereby developed a curriculum that includes skills and knowledge needed for United Nations peacekeeping forces to address the increasing complexity of challenges in peacekeeping, including the promotion of protection for women and children in armed conflict. We therefore welcome the idea to develop dedicated child protection capacity in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

In conclusion, in our quest to safeguard the rights of children, we duly appeal to all Member States to enhance cooperation in building a better world where children can grow up proudly, freely and peacefully. Let us all preserve the innocence of children.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Argentina aligns itself with the statement made by the delegation of Norway on behalf of the States that have endorsed the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration.

At the outset, I wish to thank France for having taken the initiative to organize this open debate in the context of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Principles and Paris Commitments, intended to protect children illegally recruited or used by armed forces or groups, which Argentina joined and fully supports.

We are also grateful for the statements made by the Secretary-General, the Special Representative and Mr. Mubin Shaikh. In this context, we wish to express our gratitude and strong support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and for her presentation of the report (S/2017/821) and its annexes. We reiterate once again that it is vital to provide all necessary support in terms of human and financial resources so as to make it possible for the Special Representative to continue with her work, in compliance with her mandate.

Argentina staunchly supports the Organization's efforts to prevent, to avert and put a stop to the six grave violations of the rights of the child in the framework of armed conflict. This commitment has been demonstrated on numerous occasions, as Argentina was one of the first States to ratify, in 2002, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It also supported the adoption of resolutions 1261 (1999), 1612 (2005), 2143 (2014) and 2225 (2015).

We also stress the progress made in terms of preventing violations of and protecting the rights of children through coordinated action between the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the tasks undertaken by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, with the cooperation of UNICEF and other bodies of the United Nations system.

Argentina also firmly supports the need to agree upon and implement measures aimed at bringing greater pressure to bear on State and non-State actors that persistently commit violations, as well as to maintain contacts with such actors in order to demobilize, separate, rehabilitate and reintegrate children associated with these groups, in cooperation with their various communities.

Child protection from a human rights perspective must be taken into account in the elaboration of the mandates of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, as well as in the peacebuilding activities of the Security Council and efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism.

In this vein, it is vital to develop, maintain and strengthen capacities in the area of peacekeeping operations in terms of prevention, protection, assistance, advice and documentation, and in monitoring violations of children's rights.

Lastly, Argentina expresses its deep concern at and vehemently condemns the growing use of schools for military purposes and the increased number of attacks against schools and hospitals. Education is key for development and the full enjoyment of human rights, and access to safe education contributes to protecting girls and boys from the perils of armed conflicts.

In this vein, Argentina stresses the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of hospitals from armed attacks. We reiterate our staunchest support for the Oslo Declaration on Safe Schools, adopted in May 2015 and initiated by Argentina and Norway. The Declaration commits States to applying the guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict, thus ensuring the right to education and the protection of children and youth in conflict situations.

In this vein, Argentina is grateful for and endorses the recommendation of the Secretary-General to adhere to the Declaration and urgently calls on the States Members of the United Nations, in particular Council members, to endorse it. In that context, in March Argentina hosted the Second International Conference on Safe Schools, in which delegations from more than 80 countries participated together with representatives of the United Nations system and civil society. The main goal of the Conference was to assess the progress made since the Declaration was adopted, in 2015. To date, it has been endorsed by 70 States.

Argentina is persuaded that only through international cooperation will it be possible to combat the scourge of attacks on schools in all their forms and manifestations, in the framework of full respect for human rights, international humanitarian law and international law.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Ms. Gregoire-Van-Haaren (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened today's important debate.

(*spoke in English*)

On my way here, I ran into a parade of very young children out for Halloween. This is a very exciting day to be a kid here in the United States. It was for me a reminder of why we are having this debate: so that all kids can be children and can be innocent in a secure and safe environment.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement of the European Union as well as with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Italy. We also fully support the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands thanks the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict for their detailed briefings. Behind the chilling trends and statistics lie an abundance of personal stories such as Mr. Shaikh's. We owe him gratitude for reminding us of our responsibility.

I would like to highlight three elements today: the erosion of international humanitarian law; the strength and resources of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and other relevant United Nations entities; and our joint responsibility to address the issue of children and armed conflict not only here in the Security Council but in other relevant United Nations forums as well.

First, international humanitarian law provides the very core of the clear legal obligations binding on all parties to armed conflict. Respect for these obligations is key, but the trend of eroding respect for international humanitarian law is alarming. If we do not act now, this erosion will become an unstoppable landslide.

The Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child are further instruments binding on States parties. Non-legally-binding commitments such as the Paris Principles and the Declaration on Safe Schools are proven incentives for positive change. The Kingdom of the Netherlands will therefore endorse the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, to be launched next month. We strongly encourage others to do the same.

Secondly, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General is key to our framework for action. The monitoring and reporting mechanism is a powerful instrument for positive change, as is the listing in the Secretary-General's report. If curtailed by political influence or a shortage of resources, these instruments risk losing their current value.

The reports we are discussing today are highly dependent on a direct presence in the field. Indeed, peacekeepers, child-protection advisers and civilian personnel across the board make a critical difference on the ground.

We welcome the strong engagement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the past months. As staunch supporters of her mandate, we appreciate the efforts that she has made in the context of proactive engagement with the parties listed in her report.

We applaud the fact that the new format of the differentiated listing is designed to have a preventive effect. At the same time, we call for maximum transparency on how the lists are compiled. Completeness, accuracy and credibility can be ensured only through an evidence-based and impartial process.

My third and last point concerns the fact that in September, the Human Rights Council decided to establish a group of eminent experts to examine alleged violations of international human rights committed by all parties to the conflict in Yemen. The Kingdom of the Netherlands, together with a core group of sponsors, played an active part in the discussions that resulted in the consensus resolution formulating that request. It was a breakthrough with direct relevance for today's debate.

Why is that? It is because ending the plight of children in armed conflict is by no means the responsibility of the Security Council alone. The Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, regional organizations and civil society all have a crucial role to play. It is also because ending the plight of children in armed conflict in Yemen, Syria or South Sudan, and all too many other countries, starts with establishing the facts and identifying perpetrators. And it is also because ending the plight of children in armed conflict is impossible if we accept impunity.

The Security Council remains seized of this matter, and we shall all remained seized on the matter until it is no longer a problem. We owe it to ourselves, but mostly to future generations, which count on us, to provide them with a safe, secure and peaceful childhood that lets them be children.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me thank the Permanent Mission of France for convening this open debate on the urgent issue of children and armed conflict. I would like to extend my gratitude to the invited speakers for their briefings. I would also like to welcome Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and to commend her work on ending the suffering that children face globally due to conflict.

Children suffer tremendously worldwide due to war, violence and armed conflict. That is especially true in the case of Afghanistan, where so many childhoods have been compromised and impacted by imposed violence and conflict for almost four decades. But the question remains: Why are our children suffering on a daily basis, and for how long will we avoid addressing the fundamental factors that threaten the lives and well-being of children in armed conflict? Just a few hours ago, before coming here, we learned that another terrorist attack took place in Kabul — taking the lives of many and leaving many victims in its wake. We have yet to hear the details, but I have no doubt that among its victims are children or children's family members.

Child protection can best be ensured by addressing the root causes of conflicts. Regardless of what we do, as long as insecurity and violence persist, the physical and psychological well-being of children will always be in danger — as we are experiencing in Afghanistan. Terror, violence and insecurity in our country are rooted in factors that lie outside Afghanistan, with regional and global dimensions. Hence, the goal should be to overcome the structural drivers of conflict and violence worldwide. The Security Council has a fundamental role to play in that regard, as the main United Nations body entrusted to maintain international peace and security. We expect the Council to respond appropriately to ensure the protection and well-being of Afghan children and children in the world at large.

The Government of Afghanistan, for its part, is fully committed to working closely with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to improve the lives of Afghan children. We also seek to build upon that relationship, as reflected by the constructive and positive meeting between the new Special Representative, Ms. Gamba, and our national security adviser on the sidelines of the General Assembly, whereby both sides agreed to facilitate increased engagement on the issue.

The protection of children and promotion of their rights are among the top priorities of the Afghan Government. To that end, our efforts towards their empowerment continue unabated, within the framework of various international instruments, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We are implementing various measures and programmes in line with our national and international commitments, aimed at ensuring that our children live in peace, security and dignity.

In that connection, we have adopted a number of policies to ensure that no child is recruited into our national defence and security forces. In 2010, we established an interministerial steering committee on children and armed conflict. In 2011, that committee developed a national action plan to end and prevent the recruitment of children into our defence and security forces. Among other reforms, we established 21 child protection units with the Afghan national and local police recruitment centres, which have prevented more than 100 underage voluntary enlistments.

We have appointed high-level focal points in our national army to promote child protection. The prevention law to combat underage recruitment into Afghan national security forces, based on article 79 of the Constitution, was signed by the former President of Afghanistan and ratified by the Parliament in November 2014. Afghan national defence and security forces have endorsed a 15-point road map towards compliance, with the support of the United Nations. Among those measures, the Government has agreed to screen all national and local police units to release all underage recruits and establish a system to investigate, prosecute and take disciplinary action against those responsible for the recruitment of children. On 21 December 2014, age-assessment guidelines to prevent and respond to child recruitment into the Afghanistan national security and defence forces was adopted by the steering committee in Kabul, which are used for volunteers who want to join the national to prevent underage recruitment into the security forces.

Since those new reforms, 35 underage children serving in the armed forces have been reunited with their families, and 289 instances of child recruitment have been prevented within the eight regional recruitment centres. Notably, the directives of Afghanistan's Ministry of Education in 2016, which instructed the Afghan national defence and security forces to stop using schools for military purposes, is commendable. The Afghan Government has established a committee to investigate instances of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the armed forces, and has welcomed the independent Commission on Human Rights and the Office of the Attorney General's investigation of crimes committed by the Afghan national police force. Additionally, the Afghan Government recently renewed the penal code and, in 2016, adopted the child protection law, which also seeks to criminalize various forms of mistreatment and abuse, including the practice of so-called bacha bazi.

Afghanistan faces tremendous challenges in our efforts to securing lasting peace and security, which inextricably affects the potential of the country's youth. We will continue to advocate the implementation of current policies so that we can end the practices that put the lives and future of our children at risk. My delegation is thankful to our international partners for supporting us in that endeavour. Afghanistan looks forward to a bright future free from violence and terror, in which all children live in freedom and peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my country's delegation wishes to thank the French presidency of the Security Council this month for its able stewardship of this critical debate. We commend the tireless efforts undertaken in drafting the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821), dated 24 August 2017. However, Iraq would like to highlight some observations on the section of the report having to do with Iraq.

According to the report, its drafting involved wide-ranging consultations throughout the United Nations, both at Headquarter and in the field. That reflects a new approach of cooperation with Member States. We held numerous consultations with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. However, none of our observations were taken into consideration, with the exception of a few trivial ones, which have no real impact on the content of the report. That is despite the fact that we cooperated fully with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, responded to all the questions it posed and shed light on a great deal of information in the section on Iraq. We also consulted with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs with respect to the content of the report.

The report acknowledges the fact that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/Da'esh was the essential cause of serious violations perpetrated against children. Da'esh was the very reason for the displacement of thousands of children, for the recruitment of children, for the use of children as suicide bombers and as spies and sources of information. The report further acknowledges that ISIL's violations were not solely perpetrated in Iraq, but that its operations also affected Libya, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. The Security Council has indicated in numerous resolutions that ISIL constitutes a terrorist organization. However, the report of the Secretary-General treated ISIL as a party to conflict. It failed to call it by its actual name, that is, a terrorist and extremist organization.

Furthermore, there is no reference whatsoever in this report to child victims born as a result of the crimes of rape perpetrated by terrorist groups, even though such instances are documented in the annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict of 15 April (S/2017/249). We have called for the inclusion of these documented cases in the report so that they could be to presented to the international community. We fail to understand why they have so far not been included in the report, even though these phenomena are dangerous and will have nefarious consequences if they are not contained.

The Secretary-General's report expresses its concerns about so-called civilian control procedures used by Government forces and about the lack of access to humanitarian access for children in the areas that have been seized by ISIL. However, Iraq welcomed the training for Iraqi security forces provided by United Nations experts, as reflected in our letter of 16 May addressed to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

According to the report, the popular mobilization forces recruited 57 children. We requested the Office of the Special Representative to provide us with a single child's name and the military units within which they were recruited, in order to take the necessary legal measures, as the popular mobilization forces have been officially under the auspices of the Iraqi Government since 26 November 2016. However, the Office of the Special Representative was unable to provide us with a single name of one of the 57 children.

Iraq is a State party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child with respect to children's involvement in armed conflict. We also took other measures, in collaboration with our partners, in particular the United Kingdom, to facilitate the adoption, on 21 September, of resolution 2379 (2017), on compiling evidence of crimes committed against innocent civilians, including children, by members of Da'esh in order to bring them to justice.

In the light of what I have said here, we call on the United Nations to be professional and specific with respect to the information in the report. Sources must be verified. The report contains vague information on Iraq, as well as accusations against Iraqi security forces and the popular mobilization forces, which we reject. Furthermore, the sources in this report are not only unreliable, some of them have questionable motives. Some of the sources are not even in the areas of operation and in the liberated areas. We must also note that Mr. Ján Kubiš, Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq, reaffirmed repeatedly that neither he nor his Office was able to verify the credibility of many of the sources in the report. He said that non-specific information in the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General constitutes a burden for a country that is defending its territory and facing one of the most ferocious terrorist organizations in existence.

We therefore reaffirm that information and statistics must be gathered from official sources that have been approved by the Iraqi Government. Information should not be gleaned from unreliable sources that cannot be verified.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Zehnder (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland thanks France for organizing today's open debate. We would like to focus on three issues.

First, Switzerland welcomes the recent release of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821) and the listing of perpetrators based on credible evidence gathered, reviewed and rigorously verified by the monitoring and reporting mechanism. We note that this year a distinction was introduced between those listed parties that "have put in place measures ... aimed at improving the protection of children" (*S/2017/821, annex I*) and those that have not. We ask the Secretary-General to provide updates on those measures and the progress made.

Secondly, and as highlighted by France, the challenges posed by violent extremism to the protection of civilians, in particular children, are a major concern. The majority of the parties listed in the annexes of the annual report are armed groups. We do not know enough about children's trajectories in and out of non-State armed groups, including those listed as terrorist and violent extremist groups. This is why Switzerland, together with UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Luxembourg, has lent its support to a research initiative of the United Nations University aimed at producing programmatic guidance to prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed groups that employ extreme violence.

Switzerland also calls on Member States involved in countering violent extremism to carry out their measures in full compliance with international law, in particular their rules of engagement must include all the necessary preventive and protective measures. Furthermore, children arrested and detained on security-related charges in counter-terrorism operations should be treated as victims of serious violations, rather than as security threats and perpetrators.

Thirdly, despite financial pressures, ensuring adequate resources for child protection within peacekeeping and political missions is essential, as they play a central role in establishing dialogue with parties to conflict to end and prevent serious violations against children, including through the signing and implementation of actions plans.

In conclusion, Switzerland would like to acknowledge that many positive steps have been taken since the creation of the children and armed conflict mandate. Among them are the more than 124,000 children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups who have been released since 2000. Nevertheless, more needs to be done. Switzerland reaffirms its support to the mandate and work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and her Office and calls for her mandate to be extended in this year's child rights resolution and sufficient resources to be allotted to her so that she can fully carry out her mandate.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Minister for Children and Youth Affairs of Ireland of Ireland.

Ms. Zappone (Ireland): I would like to thank today's briefers and, in particular, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for providing valuable testimony for today's debate.

Ireland also aligns itself with the comments delivered on behalf of the European Union.

We are here today to discuss a topic that none of us would wish to have to discuss. As the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs of Ireland, my focus is on helping to build a better, safer society for children and young people. They are our future. However, despite the progress we have made in some areas, the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821) highlights very worrying trends. They include a disturbing increase in the number of child victims of conflict, as well as a considerable increase in the recruitment and use of children in certain conflict situations. It also points to an increasing disrespect for international humanitarian law and the impact that that has on children.

During a conflict, existing social, financial and physical barriers to education are often compounded by indiscriminate or targeted attacks on places of education. The targeting of civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, can have devastating consequences for children's health, safety and education. Ireland's humanitarian assistance policy recognizes that children are often disproportionately affected by conflict. Children have always been the most vulnerable in conflict situations to the effects of malnutrition and disease, but other risks that threaten the well-being of children include separation from families or other caregivers, recruitment into armed forces or groups, economic exploitation, physical or sexual abuse, gender-based violence and physical and psychological distress. Warlords, criminals and thugs have placed them on the front lines.

Ireland shares the deep concern expressed by others about children separated from their loved ones by war, terror and human smuggling. A year ago, I instructed our Child and Family Agency, Tusla, to establish a national project office to assist children living alone in the former "jungle camp" at the French port of Calais. We are now assisting 30 young people who have fled conflicts in Africa and Asia to restart their lives in Ireland. I can confirm today that, in the next two weeks, Tusla teams will meet and assess another 11 children for arrival into Ireland. We have built the capacity to do so, and I am determined that we will play a strong role in assisting, supporting and protecting separated children. The protection of women and girls from gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse in crisis and conflict situations is a priority for Ireland. As Chair of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women this year and next year, Ireland will embed the women and peace and security agenda in all areas of its work.

Civil society has a crucial role to play in supporting vulnerable and at-risk children. Ireland is proud to support the important work being done by the International Committee of the Red Cross and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in locating children who have been separated from their families by conflict or displacement, with a view to reuniting them with their relatives. Ireland also supports the International Commission on Missing Persons, which focuses on conflict, post-conflict and natural-disaster situations. The Secretary-General's report highlights a number of issues for children who are victims of the conflict in Colombia. Ireland is pleased to be offering assistance for the implementation of the peace agreements, including projects on gender and justice. As we approach the twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we know from our own experience of peacebuilding the importance of those issues.

The Secretary-General's report outlines very clearly the dire situation facing children in many conflict situations, and, put simply, too often children bear the brunt of adult conflicts. No one is perfect. We know only too well in Ireland the consequences that can flow from not always protecting, valuing and listening to our children. That is why we must all step up our efforts to protect children, not least in and from conflict. Given its mandate, the Security Council has particular responsibility to ensure that it is using its tools and mechanisms effectively to end violations against children.

Once again, Madam President, I thank you for organizing today's very timely and important debate.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Locsin (Philippines): My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict for their proactive work in preventing and promoting, monitoring and ensuring accountability with regard to the grave violations committed against children in armed conflicts.

The 2016 report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/HRC/34/44) brings to light the tragic effects of armed conflict on children, while highlighting the good practices and headway made. The Philippines is heartened to note the delisting of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front group from the report after they finally stopped the recruitment of children in armed conflict. A total of 1,869 children identified by the Front as associated with its armed wing were released from combat duty in a process that culminated early this year.

Despite existing pockets of conflict in the country, including the recently ended Marawi siege, the State, as responsible for the human rights situation in the country, continues to prioritize the welfare of children and to discourage insurgencies from using children as warriors for a dubious and disgraceful advantage. In the Philippines, children are regarded as zones of peace, in accordance with the law on the special protection of children against abuse, exploitation and discrimination. That means that children must not be exposed to attack by using them as combatants. They are entitled to special respect and protection.

Of paramount importance is the protection of children from any form of threat, assault, torture, or other cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. The delivery of social services to children, regardless of the situation they are in, must also be unhampered. No military advantage can possibly be gained by leaving them hurt, exposed and unattended. Education should continue in war and peace. In line with that policy, schools are also declared zones of peace. The Philippine State, which enjoys the distinction of maintaining one of the best public education systems in the developing world, has urged all schools to adhere to the Department of Education's basic curriculum and pedagogy, and, while the State does not have the wherewithal to offer classes in Marxism-Leninism, to reserve that subject for home schooling if that is some people's desire.

The military has always been at the forefront of protecting the welfare of children in armed conflict. In February 2016, the Armed Forces issued a circular, "Child protection in armed conflict situations", which serves as a policy guide for the armed forces in preventing the commission of grave violations of children's rights. It sets the procedures for monitoring, reporting, and responding to violations committed by State or non-State actors. More protective laws, circulars and policy statements are in the works. However, like those present here at today's meeting, we prefer to measure success by results, rather than simply by good intentions, with which the road to war is paved. That is why accuracy and objectivity in reporting is imperative. It can make or break the sincere desire to continue the endeavour to protect children in conflict.

The Philippines will continue to help in the work of the United Nations towards the protection of children in armed conflict, and to support the publication of its annual report in line with its adherence to the highest standards of international law and the principles of transparency and accountability.

In my meeting with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, her office expressed the desire to maintain a continuous engagement with the States Members of the United Nations on those issues. I welcome that initiative because it addresses two concerns that, in my Government's experience, pose a challenge to achieving fair and balanced reporting on the part of the Special Representative. First, it addresses the brevity of time within which a Member State must provide comments to a draft report; and secondly, the lack of clarity and details regarding some cases cited in reports, which make it difficult for the Governments concerned to validate the claim, thereby making the work not unlike boxing with shadows.

We have no need or desire to hide abuses. We want and we have an army that fights to win conflicts, as the Marawi siege demonstrated with distinction, and do not want to create new conflicts by committing abuses, especially against children. That is the dubious distinction of insurgents. We are proud, and not ashamed, of our army. I have personally observed the care and caution shown by the army in avoiding civilian casualties when I worked as a television journalist covering the battlefield for ABS-CBN News. We do not know, however, how insurgents regard the practices that we all abhor.

It is my Government's hope that, in establishing and nurturing a functioning relationship with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Governments will be able to facilitate the issuance of timely, accurate and balanced reports, which will pave the way to stamping out violence against children in the wars that Member States, sadly, still wage to protect their people from enemies and their countries from dismemberment.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Ms. Jaquez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the French presidency for convening this open debate, as well as Secretary-General António Guterres and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for presenting the annual report on the subject (S/2017/821).

We welcome the recommendations contained in the report aimed at strengthening concrete action towards the protection of girls, boys and adolescents in armed conflicts, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2225 (2015). The best interests of children must be protected by the Organization and each of its Member States, and the agencies and sectors of its system, under any circumstances. It is painful to have to recall that fact and to be concerned by it, as it is not the global status quo.

We condemn all activities that violate the right of boys, girls and adolescents to well-being, including in situations of armed conflicts, in which the basic rights of children are specifically affected. The commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups provides a good opportunity to continue raising awareness of the challenges that the United Nations and the international community as a whole continue to face. In that regard, we once again call on all States to comply with the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, in particular because children are worthy not only of general protection in armed conflicts, but also of the special protection that recognizes their particularly vulnerable situation in those situations.

We also strongly condemn violence towards and sexual exploitation of children, and we welcome the measures adopted by the United Nations to strengthen its zero-tolerance policy aimed at preventing and combating violence and sexual abuse committed by its own personnel and members of peacekeeping operations, in which, unfortunately, minors have been victimized.

Seventy-two countries, including Mexico, have signed the Voluntary Compact between the Secretary-General and States, which was presented at the high-level meeting on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse on 18 September. We call on the Security Council to ensure the protection of children as a central component of the mandates it designs for peace operations. Similarly, Mexico supports the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative aimed at addressing sexual violence in armed conflicts, which is a proposal by the United Kingdom aimed at strengthening the response of the international community on the issue. We also reaffirm our support for the United Nations Children, Not Soldiers campaign and the achievement of its objectives.

However, despite those agreements and political commitments, we must focus our attention, with a heavy heart, on the increase in the radicalization, recruitment and employment of minors by non-State armed groups. The proliferation of criminal groups, particularly terrorists, constitutes a prominent threat to children and adolescents. That is why States must work to generate and promote a comprehensive response to violent extremism, while paying special attention to the root causes of its proliferation.

The Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism is a good guide for the creation of comprehensive measures to prevent, address and combat the dissemination of that scourge among vulnerable groups, including children. We agree with the Secretary-General's call to respond to the threats that prevent the strengthening of sustainable peace in all its aspects, in full compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights law and the rights of refugees.

One of the priorities must be to implement measures for the effective reintegration of children previously associated with extremist groups, in order to ensure their treatment as victims who deserve human rights protection and psychological care, and not as security threats subject to prosecution or detention without the possibility of rehabilitation. As part of its commitment to that agenda, Mexico stands with the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, which represents a collective commitment for children. It is also a member of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. As a member of those groups and in conjunction with them and the other Members of the United Nations, Mexico will continue to fight to prevent and alleviate the suffering of those who are the present and the future of our societies, as it is our obligation to transform adversities into opportunities for all the children of the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Itegboje (Nigeria): At the outset, I thank the delegation of France for convening this debate on a subject of great importance within the context of the well-being of children. I also thank the Secretary-General and other distinguished briefers for sharing their insights. We acknowledge the efforts of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, to strengthen the effectiveness and credibility of the United Nations in the promotion of the well-being of children affected by conflict.

Conflict situations put children at great risk, especially where non-State armed groups are involved. Children risk being killed, abducted or maimed. They are also vulnerable in other ways. They face sexual abuse, recruitment as child soldiers, trafficking, slavery and other atrocities committed by armed groups. That situation underscores the need for States, the United Nations, regional organizations and other stakeholders to take urgent measures to enhance the protection of children affected by conflict.

It is obvious that armed non-State actors are active in armed conflict situations around the world today. It is also becoming increasingly clear that they are responsible for grave violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law. Their activities show that they indeed pose a serious threat to the well-being of children.

Nigeria condemns, in the strongest terms, the mass abductions of children by non-State armed groups, including those carried out by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all abducted children. We demand that parties to armed conflicts immediately cease unlawful attacks and threats of attacks against schools, students and teachers. For our part, we have launched a safe schools initiative aimed at providing a safe and secure learning environment for children.

The proliferation of non-State armed groups, their unorthodox methods of operation and their connection to transnational criminal networks make it particularly difficult to enforce legal provisions to protect children in situations of armed conflict. That situation may, to some extent, explain the lawlessness and utter depravity that characterize the activities of armed groups and make them such a grave danger to the well-being of non-combatants, especially children. That is clearly seen in the case of ISIS and Boko Haram.

Regional and subregional organizations have an important role to play in addressing the plight of children affected by armed conflict. In that regard, we welcome the growing cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union. That important partnership is anchored in the September 2013 agreement between both organizations, aimed at taking measures to protect African children from the impact of armed conflict. Nigeria urges both organizations to continue to strengthen their win-win collaboration on that important issue.

At the subregional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has shown a strong commitment to promoting the well-being of children affected by conflict through its Accra Declaration on War-Affected Children in West Africa, adopted in April 2000. The Declaration commits ECOWAS member States to take a broad range of measures to protect and rehabilitate war-affected children. In order to live up to their commitments under the Declaration, ECOWAS member States must continue to enhance their domestic competencies and capabilities to respond effectively to the varying needs and vulnerabilities of children in conflict situations.

The reprehensible acts committed by Boko Haram not only rob Nigerian children of their innocence, but also constitute grave violations of international and domestic laws, which provide guarantees for the rights and interests of children during periods of hostilities and armed conflict. As a consequence of the actions of that group, the Nigerian Government issued an advisory, sending a strong message to the Boko Haram terrorists that they will be held accountable for their ongoing violations of domestic laws and international conventions to which Nigeria is signatory.

Nigeria is firmly committed to meeting its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Those instruments have been incorporated into the laws of our country. They contain extensive provisions against the abuse of the rights of children, and we are determined to enforce them.

More importantly, Nigeria has just concluded the drafting of a national policy on civilian protection and harm mitigation. The policy sets forth the Government's commitment to protecting civilians and to the mitigation of harm to civilians, while adhering to international humanitarian law, international human rights law, constitutional principles and domestic law during the planning and conduct of all security operations, and to the better protection of civilians from the actions of armed non-State actors.

Nigeria believes that the Council should continue to pay attention to the issue of children and armed conflict. It is a growing problem that requires a collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders — States, international organizations, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations — in order for it to be addressed effectively.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the protection of the rights of children in conflict situations. We are taking all necessary measures to meet the threat posed to the welfare of children by Boko Haram. Together with our neighbours and international partners, we are winning the war against the terrorists, and we are resolutely determined to bring them to justice.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the French delegation for convening this open debate to address an issue of the utmost importance to us, namely, the protection of children in conflict situations. We welcome this discussion on children and armed conflict, which is being presided over by a fraternal country. We thank the Secretary-General and Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for their efforts regarding children and armed conflict, as well as Mr. Mubin Shaikh, for the quality of their briefings delivered this morning.

The Security Council ongoing discussion of this issue, which has persisted for many years, demonstrates the international community's commitment to the protection of children and to strengthening the hope that people have to achieve safe and stable societies and a respect for the obligations stemming from international law on parties to conflict with regard to the protection of the rights of children during armed conflict. That is critical if we seek to protect civilians, particularly children, who pay the highest price in such conflicts because they are the most vulnerable. In the armed conflicts raging today, violent extremist groups show contempt for those obligations under international humanitarian law; they have perpetrated grave violations against children and show no hesitation in doing so.

The State of Qatar is convinced of the importance of addressing the root causes of violent extremism and armed conflict. We attach great significance to education in our policies and development projects at the national and international levels, given the positive effects of education on children, especially in safe areas far from violence, terrorism and extremism. We are further convinced that access to education remains a right even in armed conflict, and we have undertaken significant efforts to provide children with education during periods of violence, particularly during armed conflict. That focus is reflected in our Education Above All initiative and others launched in conjunction with other international organizations. As a result, we delivered high-quality education services to millions of children throughout the world in 2016.

Furthermore, in 2016 the State of Qatar launched an initiative, jointly with the President of the General Assembly at the current session and a large number of Member States, to organize a high-level thematic debate at the General Assembly focused on the protection of children and young people affected by violent extremism. We reached conclusions and made recommendations, which represent significant progress in that area. On the basis of those efforts, we also signed an memorandum of understanding on 18 September with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and Silatech, with a view to strengthening capacity-building among young people throughout the Arab and Muslim world. We seek to build their capacity to launch projects to protect themselves from violent extremism.

We are committed to protecting the right to education in emergency situations and to ratifying the Safe Schools Declaration, adopted at the Oslo conference. In that regard, we welcome the working framework of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. Our hope is that other initiatives and examples will emerge enabling States to uphold their obligations under those declarations.

We are also deeply troubled by the violations afflicting children in the occupied Palestinian territories and Syria, as was mentioned in the Secretary-General's report. It is important for the international community to categorically and tirelessly seek to arrive at a fair and lasting solution to those conflicts, where children once again pay the highest price.

To conclude, the State of Qatar will spare no effort to support international efforts to protect children under all circumstances with all means at our disposal, so that they may grow up in a safe and healthy environment, develop their skills and enjoy a future of peace and prosperity for all people throughout the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of Latvia, Lithuania and my country, Estonia. We fully associate ourselves with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

We thank France for convening today's open debate, and the Secretary-General, his Special Representative and the civil society representative for their briefings.

The special attention given to non-State armed groups is quite relevant in the light of the latest Secretary-General's report (S/2017/821) given that they have committed nearly three times more violations than Government forces. That presents a new set of challenges to Member States. We thank the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and UNICEF for their undisputed work in the field. It is reassuring to read in the Secretary-General's report that there have been positive developments with regard to engagements with parties to conflicts. We salute the successes achieved through Children, Not Soldiers campaign.

(*spoke in English*)

Sadly, however, compared to the previous year, in some countries, for example in Syria and Somalia, the recruitment and use of children has more than doubled. Also, the number of casualties has reached an all-time high in Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We share the Secretary-General's concern for the impact that the increasing disrespect for international law has had on children. Member States must uphold their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Moreover, it is important to redouble the pressure on non-State armed groups that recruit and use children in their ever-expanding activities across borders.

In that regard, we clearly see impunity as one of the main enablers of the recurrence of such grave violations against children. It is only by consistent prosecution that we can deter the commission of such crimes. We therefore believe that the Security Council should influence State and non-State actors in conflict zones and get them to comply with international law, including by better use of sanctions instruments, as well as by referring matters to the International Criminal Court in situations where States are unable or unwilling to bring perpetrators to justice domestically.

At the same time, we must keep in mind that children drawn into war should be primarily seen as victims and not as criminals. Every effort should be made to bring about their reintegration into normal life, especially former girl soldiers and repeated rape victims, who are often shunned and rejected by their families and communities. Furthermore, strengthening child protection systems is one of the most cost-effective measures for building resilience and promoting sustainable development. Strong child-protection systems can mitigate the impacts of conflicts and crises on boys and girls. Allowing children to be children can become the strongest and most cost-effective measure for rehabilitating and reintegrating children with traumatic experiences.

Finally, we all know that education is one of the key elements in prevention. It is therefore important to ensure education for children in times of crisis. During emergencies, children in schools can be cared for, accounted for and protected from abduction, recruitment, and sexual and economic exploitation. Education also helps to avoid recruitment or re-recruitment and paves the way to better reintegration into society.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Al Musharakh (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I thank the French presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and Mr. Mubin Shaikh for their briefings.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The United Arab Emirates believes that our collective priority must be to promote peace and stability and ensure a better future for our younger generations. That is why today's open debate is critical. It is our children who suffer the most from the crises in our region, which are caused by extremism, terrorism and the continued interference by States in each other's internal affairs.

We welcome the focus of today's open debate on violations committed by non-State actors. We are extremely troubled by the gravity of the abuse of children by extremist and terrorist groups that are supported by rogue States across our region in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya and Yemen. For such groups, especially Da'esh, the killing, recruitment, abduction and sexual abuse of children, as well as their use as human shields, are deliberate tactics that are at the core of their modus operandi. Violations against children also extend to the longest, most entrenched crisis in our region, namely, the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories. Palestinian children continue to be affected by the occupation and are being detained, killed and maimed, particularly in the West Bank. All of the crises in our region could be resolved, we firmly believe, through comprehensive political solutions. We support the efforts of the United Nations in that regard.

With regard to the situation in Yemen, I would like to note that the United Arab Emirates is a member of the coalition seeking to restore legitimacy in Yemen at the legitimate request of the Yemeni Government to protect civilians, including children, from the Houthi coup. Since its inception, the coalition has consistently worked to implement and reinforce a framework for a political solution in Yemen, based on resolution 2216 (2015), the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference.

The United Arab Emirates condemns the egregious violations committed by the Iran-supported Houthis, including the recruitment and use of children as child soldiers and as human shields, as well as the use of civilian hospitals and schools for military purposes, the laying of landmines and attacks on the border of Saudi Arabia, which have resulted in civilian casualties, internal displacement and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. The coalition has sustained its efforts to minimize the impact of the conflict on children, as we believe that every child casualty is one too many. To that end and in addition to developing general protective measures, the coalition has taken specific measures to address child recruitment by the Houthis, including the rehabilitation of child soldiers and securing their safe and expedited return to the custody of the Government of Yemen, so that they can be reunited with their families. That is being done in coordination with UNICEF.

In that respect, the commitment of the United Arab Emirate to the protection of children is comprehensive. Our efforts to address the immediate medical needs and ensure the long-term well-being of children affected by conflict have included the establishment of dedicated hospitals and medical centres for women and children, as well as a shelter for orphans and children separated from their parents because of the war in Iraq. We have also provided education and occupational training for displaced children in shelters in Iraq and Jordan.

Any discussion of violations against children by non-State actors must address the subjugation and exploitation of girls by terrorists and violent extremist groups, which use sexual and gender-based violence, including human trafficking, sexual slavery, forced marriage and forced pregnancy, to terrorize communities and generate revenue. The international community must remain steadfast in ensuring that the full implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, with its emphasis on conflict prevention and the meaningful participation of women, is integral to its response.

To conclude, the United Arab Emirates would like to offer a few suggestions on how to strengthen the impact of future reports on the protection of children in armed conflict.

First, we should ensure that the reports and their monitoring mechanisms are based on independent and reliable sources that address, in a balanced manner, violations committed throughout the entirety of an armed conflict. Secondly, we should guarantee continuous and full consultations with States, as mandated in resolution 1612 (2005), so as to avoid misinformation and enable accurate and comprehensive assessments. In that regard, the United Arab Emirates welcomes the cooperation and consultations with Member States that Special Representative Gamba and her Office have undertaken. We welcome their visits to the coalition's headquarters. We reiterate our support and deep appreciation for her just, necessary and universal mandate.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Ms. Agladze (Georgia) Let me express our gratitude to the French presidency for convening today's open debate on children and and armed conflict.

Georgia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. Let me add a few remarks in my national capacity.

Protecting children in armed conflict is our common responsibility, yet children continue to be abducted in situations of armed conflict and recruited as combatants. They fall victim to acts of violence, murder, maiming and arbitrary detention across the globe. Despite the broad understanding of the nature of the problem, we have yet to see more tangible progress on the ground. As stated in the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflicts (S/2017/821), there were at least 4,000 verified violations against children by Government forces and more than 11,500 verified violations by the range of non-State armed groups in 2016. Asymmetric attacks have had a particularly severe impact on children in areas controlled by non-State armed actors and terrorist groups.

Among the troubling trends presented in the report are the abhorrent use of war tactics by a number of parties to conflicts, including the denial of humanitarian access to children. We have all witnessed children trapped in besieged areas or deprived of access to food, water and medical assistance, including vaccines. In 2016, more than 750 attacks on schools and hospitals were verified by the Organization. With more than 245 million children estimated to be living in conflict zones, the issue of children missing out on education owing to the effects of conflict is particularly alarming.

At the same time, there has been tangible progress in protecting children through the United Nations Children, Not Soldiers campaign. With the assistance of UNICEF and other United Nations partners, thousands of children have been released from captivity and reintegrated in their communities. Effective tools have been developed and important initiatives generated through the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, providing a strong framework for addressing grave violations against children all over the world.

As we commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Commitments, we reiterate our pledge to put an end to and prevent the recruitment of children into armed forces, to implement sanctions against people having unlawfully recruited children, to reintegrate child soldiers into their communities and to make every effort to have the Paris Commitments observed and applied through political, humanitarian and technical assistance of Member States. It is vital that all parties to a conflict unconditionally and immediately release children incorporated in armed forces.

We, the States Members of the United Nations, together with humanitarian and development partners, need to take concrete steps to alleviate the consequences of armed hostilities on younger generations. Georgia has given priority to the protection of the rights of children in all aspects of life by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as its Optional Protocols. Our Government spares no effort in assisting children affected by conflict and forced displacement from both the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, and in guaranteeing adequate living conditions for them through extending welfare programmes and the implementation of relevant strategies.

We are extremely concerned that the fundamental human rights of children continue to be violated on a daily basis in both occupied regions of Georgia. Since 2015, the Georgian language has been banned as a language of instruction in the early grades at the remaining Georgian schools in the Gali district, gradually resulting in the total restriction of native-language instruction in the Abkhazia region. In the academic years from 2015 to 2017, approximately 4,000 pupils were deprived of their right to get an education in their native Georgian language. A similar process was initiated in Tskhinvali region. Since September 2017, native-language instruction has been banned in Georgian schools of Akhalgori, Znauri and Sinaguri, as part of Russia's far-reaching strategy aimed at erasing Georgian identity in the occupied regions.

Against this backdrop, while reaffirming our commitment to the protection of the fundamental rights of the child, we call on the international community to increase its efforts aimed at protecting children's rights in the occupied regions of Georgia and other conflict-affected areas of the world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to express its appreciation to the French presidency for convening today's important open debate. We thank the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and Mr. Mubin Shaikh for their briefings.

We condemn all incidents that have caused civilian casualties across the world, especially among children. The Sudan has been making significant efforts to promote the protection of children and their rights, in cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts and other child-related entities, such as UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, inter alia, pursuant to the Sudan's regional and international commitments, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols, as well as International Labour Organization Conventions 138 and 182. The Sudan has also signed the Paris Principles and Commitments, whose tenth anniversary we celebrate this year.

We have established a national council on child welfare, child and family units within police departments, and human rights protection units in the military. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the Sudanese armed forces have long-standing and well-established regulations that, even before the independence of the Sudan, in 1956, prohibited the recruitment of children under the age of 18, in line with the provisions of international law. The Sudan has also established an integrated legal system for juvenile justice, which includes the 2010 Child Act. We have also set up special prosecution protocols and given technical training to prosecutors.

To prevent violations of the right of children, we have appointed a public prosecutor for Darfur-related crimes to investigate allegations related to Darfur from the outbreak of the conflict in 2003 until the end of this year, in particular those allegations related to the violations of the rights of children. We have also established a fact-finding mission on the abduction and recruitment of children in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states and launched a comprehensive national ten-year plan to promote human rights in the Sudan.

In March 2016, the Sudan signed a joint action plan with the United Nations to protect children in armed conflict. Under this plan, we revised and amended rules and regulations with regard to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the areas where conflict had ceased. This has made it possible to provide protection and welfare for affected children, especially in the field of vaccination against disease. We would take this opportunity to thank the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, the UNICEF Office in Khartoum and the UNICEF regional office in Jordan for their exemplary and commendable cooperation, particularly with regard to sheltering children who had fought in the ranks of the Justice and Equality Movement and to providing protection and psychological support for these children upon their release.

My delegation takes this opportunity to reiterate its commitment to the implementation of the important action plan to protect children in armed conflict, in order to ensure the continuation of these efforts, uphold our responsibility towards children and achieve security and stability for them. We hope that this positive step will lead to the delisting of the Sudan from the reports of the Secretary-General. We are confident that an objective review of the facts would achieve that end. We take note of the Secretary-General annual report on the protection of children in armed conflict (S/2017/821) released last week, which commends the Sudan's achievement in this respect. We consider this commendation to be an initial step on the logical, just and necessary path towards the Sudan being delisted from the annual report.

Further, with respect to the vaccination of children in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, we cite the difficulties noted by the UNICEF Office in the Sudan more than two years ago. Armed non-State actors in those two states prevented the vaccination of children. We call on the Security Council to take note of that incident, which threatened the lives and futures of Sudanese children in those two areas.

In order to address the issue of children in a comprehensive and integrated manner, my delegation calls for assisting Governments of countries facing conflicts in their efforts to end these conflicts. Joint action plans should be developed in order to deal with armed groups, aimed at condemning the use and exploitation of children and compelling them to lay down their weapons and engage in negotiations. States should also be involved in any matter relating to the issue of children and armed conflict in other States, while at the same time proceeding in complete transparency and fully respecting the principle of national sovereignty.

Concerning the situation in Yemen, we welcome the report of the Secretary-General's acknowledgement of the constructive measures adopted by the coalition aimed at restoring legitimacy in Yemen, which will lead to promoting the protection of children in that country. The coalition announced that it would strictly adhere to the principle that all potential targets were civilian until proved otherwise, and ensure every precaution to avoid civilian casualties, especially among children.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates its commitment to pursuing cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General because we believe in the noble principles underpinning the protection of children and their dignity. We also cooperate with the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We reiterate our commitment to implementing all international and regional instruments involving the promotion and the protection of the rights of children to which we are party, and we will continue to closely cooperate with all United Nations bodies dedicated to the welfare of children.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank France for convening this debate, and commend it for its unwavering dedication to the cause of children and its role as chief architect of an international plan of action, implemented early in the millennium, aimed at addressing serious violations affecting children. This debate, which is in line with the principles and commitments adopted in Paris during the Free Children from War Conference of February 2007 and the Protecting Children From War Conference of 21 February, will continue to advance international efforts to protect children, prevent them from being recruited and sent into combat, and strengthen our determination to work to ensure a better life for all children. I would like to thank this morning's briefers for their briefings.

For a number of years — and to be more precise, since the Graça Machel report (A/51/306) was presented to the fifty-first session of the General Assembly in 1996, drawing the entire world's attention to the specific needs of children in armed conflict — the international community has acted to protect children who have fallen into that category of vulnerability. From that call to action, a global instrument was born that facilitated the release of tens of thousands of children who had long been left to their own devices in regions ravaged by violence and war and who were denied even the most basic rights.

Children in conflict are thrown into a life marked by violence and horrors. They are separated from their family members, deprived of their childhood and often treated in the most barbaric manner. Many of them are used as soldiers, messengers, sex slaves, spies, traffickers or porters of munitions. Many are used as human shields or deployed to perpetrate suicide attacks. Some are drugged before being sent into combat, while forced to commit atrocities — sometimes against their own communities. That is unacceptable.

The work of the international community would benefit from a multifaceted and strategic approach not just in addressing current conflicts, but also in stressing the dimension of prevention. At the same time, adopting a pragmatic approach that combines incentives and constraints, in particular with regard to seeking justice and ending impunity, is indispensable. Morocco condemns in the strongest terms all forms of violence directed against children, including their kidnapping and detention by armed groups, use as human shields and hostages, recruitment in refugee camps and forced separation from their families.

Morocco was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in

Armed Conflict and to endorse the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups. Morocco has adopted a very important measure of its own to combat all forms of violence perpetrated against children.

The Kingdom of Morocco is closely following with great concern the dangerous developments in Yemen characterized by the use of force and violence by the Houthis and their persistent attempts to undermine the progress made by the Yemeni national dialogue and its legitimacy. Against the backdrop of those events and the dangers that they represent, the Kingdom of Morocco expresses its full solidarity with the brotherly Yemeni people during this decisive stage of its history and as their suffering has increased following violations of laws that the parties have agreed in good faith in order to establish legitimacy in Yemen.

Moreover, Morocco supports the coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen, established at the request of the legitimate Government of Yemen in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and aimed at protecting civilians following the military escalation by the Houthis, who have undermined the peace, stability and security of Yemen. The main goal of the coalition is to support the political transition in Yemen in accordance with the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and its Implementation Mechanism, the outcome of the national dialogue and resolution 2216 (2015). Morocco subscribes to the open spirit of collaboration that has been expressed by all members of the coalition, which will work in close cooperation with all involved parties to restore peace and stability in Yemen, and arrive at a political settlement to the conflict pursuant to the relevant resolutions, while at the same time ensuring the protection of all civilians, including children.

The primary cause of children's deaths in Yemen is their deliberate and systematic recruitment as soldiers by Houthis and their use as human shields, which has been documented in a number of United Nations reports. We regret that that issue is not mentioned the report. We note that the lack of reliable, impartial and credible information and the failure to consult with members of the Coalition in Yemen has influenced the neutrality of the data presented in the report.

Lastly, the report also does not mention the role that the coalition is playing in providing humanitarian assistance, in particular the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Relief whose new programme aimed at reintegration has benefited more than 2,000 Yemeni children.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Prince (Bangladesh): I thank the presidency for organizing this open debate. We take note of the comprehensive concept note (S/2017/892, annex). We also take note of the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/821) and its recommendations.

Bangladesh shared its views and priorities earlier this month in the Security Council. We remain committed to the protection of children in armed conflict. Our peacekeepers continue to work to prevent the recruitment of children by parties to conflicts. They remain careful not to use schools for military purposes.

Our concerns about the protection of children have been brought close to home once again. Children represent perhaps the largest group of victims of the ongoing Rohingya crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Since 25 August, 600,000 people, of whom almost 60 per cent are children, have entered Bangladesh. To date, our social services division has established that 22,484 of them are orphans. The dire situation that those children were facing in Myanmar is only too telling. Some 240,000 of those children are in need of additional support; 30,843 have been screened for acute malnutrition; more than 135,000 have received measles and rubella vaccines; and 72,334 have received polio vaccines. Some 453,000 people, most of whom are children, are in need emergency assistance, and 348,000 children are in need of psychosocial support.

Those numbers are huge, and continue to increase. Every number adding up to those statistics represents a child. They were all born in Myanmar and should enjoy protection by their State. Instead, they have chosen not to remain there. There are too many shocking stories. Let me just share one or two of them that were documented by the rapid-response mission of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in September. A 12-year-old girl from Rathedaung township said,

> "The Myanmar security forces and Rakhine individuals surrounded our house and started to shoot. It was a situation of panic — they shot my

> sister in front of me. She was only seven years old. She cried and told me to run. I tried to protect her and care for her, but we had no medical assistance on the hillside and she was bleeding so much that after one day she died. I buried her myself. There were helicopters in the air, and they used launchers to try to attack us when we were in the hills. My mother was outside the house with my four brothers. I do not know where they are now. My father was jailed a month before this. We do not know why and we do not even know whether he is dead or alive."

Another 12-year-old from Buthidaung township said,

> "Everyone lost someone. Many children were looking for their family members. It was total chaos, and I thought we were safe the moment we reached the border, but then the Myanmar army came from all directions and started shooting at us. Many people ran into the nearby jungle, but some old people died in front of my eyes."

Should we allow this when we have so many commitments to protecting our children from violence and armed conflict? Should we allow so many children to be exposed to killing, maiming, abduction and trafficking, violent extremism, sexual violence and child labour? Should these children be counted as the ones left behind? In the name of these children, we plead with the Council to act in a bold and determined manner. More than two months into the crisis, the Council should adopt a resolution to send a clear message against violence, impunity and human rights violations. The Council can no longer afford to lose sight of the situation in Myanmar and treat it as an internal or bilateral issue. It is critical that awareness of the situation in Myanmar be kept alive on the Council's agenda until all of these children are allowed to return to their homes in Rakhine state in safety and dignity. Going on the early signs, Bangladesh is convinced that our bilateral efforts will not achieve that. Myanmar is already dropping references to return and deportation from key documents.

Our Prime Minister's embrace of the injured and traumatized Rohingya children has sent a clear message to our entire nation. Bangladesh will support these children in temporary shelters as long as it can, but more than anything else these children want to hear that they can soon go back to Myanmar as its proud citizens. The United Nations and the Council are their last hope. Let us not fail them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Heumann (Israel): I would like to join others in welcoming Ms. Virginia Gamba, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

I would like to start by sharing with the Council some of the voices of war's youngest victims, the children who suffer from armed conflict around the world. Razan, just seven years old, is from Syria. She said,

> "I like to be alone, to be able to go out and no one kidnaps me. And for there to be no fighters or anything, and no bombing."

Fatima Mohammed Ali grieves as her 3-month-old daughter fights severe malnutrition in Yemen, saying, "There are times that I wish for death instead of living this life." Martha was captured as a teenager by Boko Haram in Nigeria. She recalls,

> "They told me not to walk around outside, and when I did they would beat me. They told me not to talk, and I would talk, so they beat me. They told me not to sing; I would sing, and they would beat me. When I sing in my tribal language I forget, but if I sit quietly I remember everything and will just cry."

The cries of children in war-torn areas transcend borders and boundaries. Thousands of children have perished in armed conflict. Thousands more may not have lost their physical lives, but they weaken in spirit every day. The hopes and dreams of boys and girls can crumble like the debris of bombed-out buildings. Just last week, the world witnessed the horrific picture of a Syrian baby dying of malnutrition. Once again, we saw the cruelties of the Al-Assad regime, its disregard for human life, through the eyes of a child weighing less than a bag of rice, struggling in the hands of a frightened nurse. Too many children are killed and maimed all over the world. A child in armed conflict may be forced to become a soldier on the front lines, a slave trapped in besieged territory or a killer of innocent people.

Israel knows these tragedies far too well. We understand what it means to face enemies who systematically exploit children as weapons of war and place our children in danger. We live every day with the threat of the next terror attack. Hamas, the party controlling Gaza, which is acknowledged internationally to be a terrorist organization, has tried time and again, year after year, and by every possible means to harm our people. The construction of its vast terror tunnel network was no unplanned decision. It is part of an ongoing systematic operation to infiltrate Israel through an underground maze, and it has one purpose and one purpose only — kidnapping and killing innocent Israeli children. In June, Hamas built a terror tunnel directly beneath an elementary school operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). This past weekend, another such tunnel was found under another UNRWA schoolyard, in yet another demonstration of Hamas's ruthless exploitation of Palestinian children, as well as of its misuse of United Nations facilities. First we found Hamas hiding rockets in schools. Then we saw it hijacking hospitals and turning them into military command centres. And now we see it jeopardizing the safety of UNRWA schoolchildren by tunnelling directly under their classrooms.

We simply cannot tolerate these blatant violations any longer. Nor can we ignore the trend encouraging incitement and the glorification of terror, through which young children are taught to kill. Palestinian children go to schools named after heinous killers. They cross streets honouring terrorists. They watch their leaders on television hand out candy in celebration of the murderers of innocent Israelis. It is therefore not surprising that dozens of Palestinian teenagers commit brutal terror attacks on our people. In one of the cruellest recent attacks, a Palestinian teenager broke into the house of a 13-year-old Israeli girl, sneaked into her bedroom and stabbed her to death. That act and his decision to commit it were a direct result of ongoing Palestinian incitement. We have come to a reality where children kill children. We cannot tolerate it any longer. The Council must send a clear message to the Palestinians that enough is enough.

We congratulate Special Representative Gamba on her new appointment and appreciate her joint efforts, with the Secretary-General, to improve the latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821) by comparison with those of previous years. But we also expect it to include the crucial context we have just provided. Without that, without objective narratives and truth, we learn only a fraction of the reality. The integrity of this institution depends on our reporting complete information.

Another crucial issue that we expect to be addressed immediately is the institutionalized bias against Israel that results from the composition of the report's formal fact-finding working group. The working group is responsible for collecting the information that goes into the draft report. Its members include United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We were astonished to learn recently that one of those NGOs, Defense for Children International-Palestine (DCI-Palestine), has clearly established links to a terrorist organization. DCI-Palestine is closely tied to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), an acknowledged terrorist organization that made airplane hijacking a preferred tool of terror. Hassan Abed Al-Jawad, a current board member of DCI-Palestine, is also a leader of the Bethlehem-based PFLP. And, as if that were not enough, a former DCI-Palestine board member, Shawan Jabareen, was jailed after being convicted of recruiting for the PFLP. Including an NGO linked to the PFLP in a report on children and armed conflict is no different from using Da'esh recruitment magazines and jihadi chatrooms for a guide to pacifism. It is entirely unacceptable, and we hope that the Special Representative will address the issue.

Despite all these absurdities, the reality on the ground is that Israel goes the extra mile. Israel acts in full accord with international law and international human rights law. It goes to extraordinary lengths to avoid harming civilians, even if that puts our soldiers at risk. Israel will always safeguard all children's rights and security, with no discrimination or special treatment. In fact, since 2013 we have treated hundreds of wounded Syrian children who have been injured under the Al-Assad regime because children are children and they all deserve to be safe and secure.

We must let children grow and change the world, and I would like to end with a quote from a girl named Hannah. After escaping Boko Haram in Nigeria, she said,

> "I am still struggling with the memories, but I am trying to focus and to continue with school and become a businesswoman."

Protecting our children is protecting our future. We must never take a child's life for granted. We must let children be children, regardless of their race, religion, birthplace or heritage.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Panama.

Ms. Flores Herrera (Panama): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Human Security Network, a cross-regional network composed of Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Mali, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand, South Africa as an observer, and my own country, Panama. The Human Security Network is an informal group of States that promotes the integration of the human security approach into policies and programmes at the national, regional and international level.

We would like to begin by paying tribute to the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her sterling work and informative reports guiding this important thematic area. At the same time, we would like to congratulate the new Special Representative, Ms. Virginia Gamba, on her appointment, and we look forward to close collaboration with her in the area of children and armed conflict.

While we are pleased to hear about the significant progress that has been made with regard to the protection of children in armed conflicts, 20 years after the inception of this mandate, it is nevertheless worrying to hear of the attacks that continue on schools and hospitals and thereby prevent children from realizing their rights; the politicization of war through the denial of humanitarian access to children in conflict situations; the recruitment and exploitation of children by parties to conflicts, including their increased use as human bombs and shields; the detention of children for alleged association with armed groups; the mistreatment of unaccompanied children fleeing conflict-ridden areas; and the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

The Network is particularly concerned about the continuing, numerous and aggravated effects of armed conflict on girls and the great difficulties they face, including conflict-related sexual violence and stigmatization. The importance of focusing particularly on supporting and strengthening all efforts aimed at protecting the human rights of the girl child continues to be crucial.

While there is clearly no doubt about the fact that some children are forced into joining armed groups, no child chooses to become involved in armed conflict. Rather, desperate children attempting to survive poverty will be more vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups. Addressing the root causes and contributing factors of their situation is therefore crucial to ensuring long-term peace, security and the achievement of sustainable development in all three of its dimensions.

We support the Secretary-General's views and recommendations in his report (S/2017/821), which calls for increasing the protection of children in all situations and at all levels, for example by endorsing the Paris Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration. It is fundamental to ensure that State and non-State actors respect, promote and protect international law and can be held accountable for any violations. Child-protection capacities on the ground are key, as is the monitoring and reporting mechanism of the United Nations mandate to protect children. The integrity, credibility, impartiality and objectivity of this mechanism therefore cannot be overstated.

In conclusion, the Human Security Network would like to express it unwavering support to the Office of the Special Representative in carrying out its important mandate, as well as to reiterate its call urging all Member States to ratify and universalize the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, in order to ensure that no child is left behind.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): South Africa welcomes the convening of this special and crucial open debate on children and armed conflict, particularly given the increase in violations of the rights of children, not only in armed conflict but also in terms of emerging asymmetrical threats to global peace and security, such as terrorism. We also welcome the briefings by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, and commend Mr. Mubin Shaikh for his brave testimony and the advocacy role he has played in preventing children from being recruited into terrorist groups.

South Africa echoes the Secretary-General's concern about the severity of the violations against children in situations of armed conflict. We are deeply concerned and appalled that more than 8,000 children were killed or maimed in conflict situations in 2016. Children are indeed the most vulnerable members of our society, as even in times of peace they require care, security and a stable environment to ensure they reach their potential as positive contributors to society. The question that we ought to ask ourselves in this debate is, Are we doing enough? Are the initiatives we are taking sufficient? What more could we do to ensure that we take on the responsibilities to protect the most vulnerable in our societies?

The work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict is admirable. We applaud the delegation of Sweden, as Chair of the Working Group, for injecting much-needed impetus into the Group's conduct and completion of its work. South Africa calls for greater resources to be devoted to the issue, especially with regard to assisting the Working Group in handling the volume of reporting and incidents in order to enable it to report back effectively in a timely manner.

We condemn in the strongest terms all violations of commitments related to the protection of children in armed conflict, including those against recruitment, the use of sexual violence, killing and maiming, attacking schools and hospitals, and abductions. We also call on all countries to work to ensure humanitarian access to civilians affected by violence. While we support the efforts of Member States that have taken measures to address their inability to adhere to these commitments, we also fully support accurate and credible reporting mechanisms, including the listing of those who commit violations, in order to dissuade them from such practices. Nevertheless, the main challenge lies not in our ability as Member States to adhere to these commitments, but rather how we address the issue of non-State actors who violate the rights of children and often do not respect the principles and goals of States Members of the United Nations in their pursuit of a peaceful and prosperous world. New strategies must be developed to counter this threat.

South Africa has been at the forefront of processes aimed at strengthening the commitments to the protection of children in armed conflict. The Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, which were adopted in 1997, are indicative of our long-standing support for this process. They formed the basis for the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, and we therefore call on all parties to pledge their firm and unwavering commitment to the Paris Principles. My delegation also reiterates its support for resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict.

We welcomed the findings of the report of Ms. Graça Machel on the impact of armed conflict on children (see A/51/306), in relation to General Assembly resolution 51/77, on the rights of the child. It signalled the start of a new consensus among Member States on the need for dedicated attention, advocacy and coordinated efforts to address the particular vulnerabilities and violations faced by children in conflict-related situations.

South Africa welcomes the recommendations and focus of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/821) on cooperation with regional and subregional organizations in coordinating efforts to address violations of the protection of children in armed conflict. In that regard, we also welcome the Secretary-General's call for Member States and regional and subregional organizations involved in negotiating the cessation of hostilities or peace agreements to include, from the outset, specific child-protection provisions in order to prioritize the prevention of grave violations. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union has held a number of open sessions based around the theme of children and armed conflict, and has called for collective security efforts to deal with the scourges of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization in Africa, with a view to ensuring respect for child rights and welfare. In our own subregion, South Africa will be hosting a capacity-building programme for young leaders in the Southern African Development Community, as part of South Africa's contribution to youth development in line with Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security, which focuses on the role of young men and women in peacebuilding and countering violent extremism.

In conclusion, as our late President Nelson Mandela once remarked, "The true character of society is revealed in how it treats its children". We believe the Security Council should take a firm and concerted stance in ensuring that our children, and young people in general, are shielded from the horrors of conflict and other violations that threaten to undermine our future prospects for the maintenance of international peace, security and development.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. AlMunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the French presidency for drawing the Security Council's attention to this important topic and to applaud France's efforts as

President of the Council this month. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and Ms. Virgina Gamba, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as Mr. Mubin Shaikh, for their valuable briefings. We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation for the efforts of the United Nations on the issue of children and armed conflict, which is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges facing the international community today.

The world is witnessing turbulence and crises that are deeply alarming and that are indicators of the increased suffering of civilians in armed conflict and particularly of vulnerable groups, including children. These conflicts, in which they are exploited, deprive them of their innocence and the right to live in dignity and to grow and survive. The vicious acts of terrorist organizations such as Da'esh and Boko Haram do not distinguish between civilians and non-civilians. Such groups often target young people, and the international community cannot remain silent and allow them to deprive children of a normal life and force them to live in terror. All children are entitled to receive protection and feel secure within their families and in their homes. Kuwait is deeply concerned about the negative impact of armed conflict on children, including through acts such as their recruitment and exploitation, group abductions, sexual violence and maiming. The international community must respond effectively to all issues in that regard affecting international peace and security, while respecting international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Principles and Commitments, aimed at protecting children from unlawful recruitment or from being used by armed forces or groups, Kuwait would like to once again express its support for them in their goal of ending inhumane practices against children. We also affirm the importance of preserving all the Security Council's tools and mechanisms established to promote every possible measure to combat such practices.

When we are discussing the issue of children in armed conflict, we must address the suffering of the defenceless Palestinian people, including Palestinian children. The attacks that have been perpetrated against them over the decades still continue. Israel continues to transgress against the Palestinian people and their children. They have to endure practices that include the destruction of education and health facilities, among other things, besides cruelties such as torture and detention. In addition, the destructive impact of Israel's control over Palestinian mobility through checkpoints and the apartheid wall has aggravated the humanitarian suffering, desperation and deprivation that affect children in alarming numbers. In that regard, we call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility for combating such repeated violations in order to ensure justice and protection for Palestine's vulnerable children and guarantee their right to live in freedom, free from injustice. Kuwait will soon be hosting an international conference on Palestinian children's suffering to highlight the violations that are being inflicted on Palestinian children at the hands of the Israel Defense Forces.

In the wake of the horrifying images we have seen this year of the chemical attacks in Syria that resulted in dozens of deaths, including of children, we must send a clear message that the use of such weapons, regardless of the perpetrators, will not be tolerated. We must end the bloodshed in Syria. It is the duty of the Security Council to find a solution to the crisis and to end these serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

With regard to the crisis in Yemen, the State of Kuwait, as a member of the League of Arab States, emphasizes that the League plays a pivotal role in protecting children in that country. It is committed to international standards, international law and international humanitarian law and has taken comprehensive measures to protect civilians. The League is one of the largest supporters and contributors to the humanitarian efforts aimed at alleviating humanitarian suffering in Yemen and rehabilitating the affected areas.

The international community today, particularly the Security Council, has a moral and legal obligation to end the practices affecting the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. The United Nations has received 480 reports of child recruitment there, in addition to six attacks on education facilities in Rakhine state. We must take all necessary measures to guarantee adherence to international humanitarian law and international human rights law in order to guarantee people's safety and free mobility, without oppression based on ethnic or religious identity.

Expressing our rage repeatedly is not enough. We must end violence against children and hold the perpetrators accountable. The world cannot lose a generation of innocent children to conflict. Indeed, 28 million children have been traumatized and forced to flee their homes because of these conflicts. We must effectively protect children and guarantee their legitimate rights.

In this regard, the State of Kuwait would like to take this opportunity to reiterate once again its support for the Security Council mandate on children and armed conflict and that we will continue to exert every possible effort to support the United Nations and the Security Council in addressing violations against children in all their forms, preventing further violations and holding the perpetrators accountable.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Castro Cordoba (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to thank you, Madam President, for having convened this debate.

Costa Rica has read and studied carefully the report of the Secretary-General on the issue of children and armed conflict (S/2017/821), submitted in accordance with resolution 2225 (2015). My delegation endorses the statement delivered by the representative of Norway on behalf of the group of countries supporting the Safe Schools Declaration and by the representative of Panama on behalf of the Human Security Network.

Costa Rica shares the view that all parties to armed conflict have a particular obligation with regard to the protection of children and that this obligation emanates directly from international law, international humanitarian law, international human rights law and numerous resolutions of the Council. That is why Costa Rica also endorses the Safe Schools Declaration and the statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The statements we heard this morning from Ms. Gamba and Mr. Shaikh described with devastating clarity the horrors suffered by millions of girls and boys as a consequence of armed conflict. Additionally, the asymmetric attacks committed by non-State armed groups have a particularly severe impact on children, particularly when they take place in densely populated areas and are carried out against schools and hospitals. Children continue to be exposed to violations of their rights, sexual violence, maiming, recruitment as fighters, including to commit suicide attacks, and killings. Those who are able to survive have an uncertain future, growing up in countries devastated by war, without any education and with very limited possibilities for developing their individual potential.

States have the primary responsibility to provide protection and assistance to children and therefore must strengthen their national capacities to attend to their needs and keep them far away from armed conflict, violent extremism and recruitment by non-State armed groups. This is why my country believes that we coordinated international efforts must be made on prevention and early warning, because this is the most effective way to meet our international obligations in this area.

However, we also acknowledge the existence of conflicts and the imperative need to ensure that in this context the norms of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international humanitarian law do not become a dead letter. It is unacceptable that girls and boys are used as soldiers and that the parties to armed conflict interrupt the provision of drinking water, electricity, gas, food, medicine or humanitarian aid to the civilian population, placing them in a situation of even greater vulnerability.

States must adopt protection measures and ensure that schools are safe and welcoming places, including under the most difficult circumstances, and that Government assistance plans incorporate a humanitarian response and the educational framework in general. We need to ensure the protection of schools as well as of the educational infrastructure. In 2015 Costa Rica was one of the 38 signatory countries to the Safe Schools Declaration, signed in Oslo, a number that today has increased to 70. We invite those that have not yet done so to join this initiative.

We also urge that the listings of those who commit such serious violations be drawn up on an impartial, independent and evidence-based manner. We believe that there needs to be a uniform, consolidated and more effective strategy for monitoring, reporting and responding to grave violations of the rights of children in the field, including the sustainability of the capacities of peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

Finally, Costa Rica urges that children recruited by armed groups be considered as victims and that they be provided protection and access to child-protection services at all detention centres where they may be located, and that an end be put to impunity for those who commit these serious violations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Mayong Onon (Malaysia): At the outset, allow me to commend you, Madam President, for having convened this timely open debate on children and armed conflict. I wish to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for their respective remarks. We also express our appreciation to Mr. Mubin Shaikh for sharing his valuable and insightful experiences as a former recruited child soldier and his continuous work in preventing children from joining terrorist groups.

There can be no doubt as to our shared international commitments on the development, preservation and protection of children in situations of armed conflict over the past two decades in the Security Council. We recognize that this year marks the tenth anniversary of the Paris Principles and related commitments. It is an important instrumental framework that continues to guide our collective efforts aimed at the release and reintegration of children associated with armed groups.

Overall reintegration strategies must take into account the special needs of girls, who are at greater risk of rape and sexual violence, exploitation and abuse. We wish to highlight the plight of second-generation children of armed conflict, namely, the children born of war, and the need to also recognize this group as victims in post-conflict settings.

We must be clear on the fact that ending and preventing grave violations against children is only one side of the coin. Equally important is ensuring that appropriate mechanisms and community-based reintegration programmes are in place to facilitate long-term efforts aimed at reconciliation and the rehabilitation and reintegration of victimized children into their respective communities.

We are conscious of the fact that a large number of parties listed in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/821) represent a wide array of non-State armed groups with diverse motives operating in vastly different circumstances. But it is important to acknowledge that there can be no one-size-fits-all approach in addressing such groups. Each must be dealt with in accordance with the unique context in which it operates. We believe that further analysis of these groups would be invaluable to ensure a more tailored approach both by the operational actors on the ground and by the Security Council.

Our discussions today raise several crucial questions as to how the tools at our disposal, including exploring non-exhaustive solutions and concrete actions, can be used to influence non-State armed groups to safeguard the lives of children. My delegation emphasizes the importance for the United Nations, the Security Council and Member States to consult and cooperate closely with one another in dealing with non-State armed groups to ensure that sustainable measures are being undertaken to improve the situation of children in armed conflict. Malaysia believes that peace processes provide a critical forum of engagement with non-State armed groups and calls for child-protection provisions to be integrated in all peace processes, negotiations and agreements.

In conclusion, the concerted efforts of all actors and stakeholders are vital to ending the grievous violations and abuses committed against children. I pledge my delegation's commitment to working with the international community to play a constructive role to that end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Munir (Pakistan): We, too, begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his insightful remarks this morning. We also appreciated the focused briefings this morning of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and Mr. Mubin Shaikh. We commend Ms. Gamba's efforts and determination to protect innocent children caught up in armed conflict.

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/821) and his briefing earlier this morning, children continue to be killed, maimed, abducted and subjected to sexual violence in conflict situations. Unfortunately, that disturbing trend shows no sign of abating. Denial of humanitarian access to refugees fleeing conflicts makes matters worse. Just yesterday, a UNICEF report warned that two thirds of unaccompanied refugees and migrant children in Greece were in need of proper care.

Over the past two decades, the United Nations has taken a number of initiatives, including "Children, not soldiers" — a campaign that emphasizes priority activities, road maps, benchmarks, deadlines and review. Such efforts have contributed to the emergence of a global consensus that no circumstances justify the recruitment and use of children in conflict. Of course, that does not mean that our work is done. On the contrary, the plight and suffering of children in armed conflict remains an issue of deep concern. A multitude of prolonged and increasingly complex conflicts continue to have a devastating impact on children. In a number of situations, a shocking disregard for international law is in evidence and impunity prevails.

Let me make three specific points in that regard. First, the strengthening of compliance and accountability mechanisms and their application to all parties, conflict States and non-State armed groups is essential to stopping violations of children's rights and preventing their recurrence. Secondly, the perpetrators of violence against children need to be identified and brought to justice through national judicial systems and, wherever applicable, international justice mechanisms. The establishment of appropriate legal frameworks with investigative and prosecutorial capacities remains central for that purpose. Above all, the goal of protecting lives is intrinsically linked with the goal of preventing conflict. It is therefore essential that the root causes of conflict be addressed and inclusive political solutions found.

My Government remains fully alive to its commitment in that regard. Pakistan was one of the earliest signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In November 2016, Pakistan also ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We have established a national commission for child welfare and development, which coordinates, monitors and facilitates the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. The National Assembly also approved a 2017 bill on a national commission on the rights of the child, which will work to promote, protect and monitor the rights of children.

Pakistan supports the mandate of the Special Representative, which it believes cannot afford accretion. The legal parameters of the mandate, as provided for by the relevant Security Council resolutions, must be respected. In that context, my delegation wishes to state for the record that references to Pakistan in the Secretary-General's report are not within the purview of its established mandate. We hope that this principle will be kept in mind in future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mrs. Pucarinho (Portugal): On the very last day of the French presidency of the Security Council, I warmly congratulate France for its important initiatives during this month, including the convening of today's open debate on children and armed conflict, an agenda to which Portugal attaches great importance.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for their commitment to this agenda, for their very comprehensive briefings this morning, and for Ms. Gamba's first report (A/72/276). Portugal reiterates its continued support for her important mandate, and we commend her efforts in improving the protection of the rights of children in armed conflict.

Portugal fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union.

Portugal welcomes and supports the Secretary-General's new approach and his impartiality as regards the evidence-based listing of perpetrators responsible for committing grave violations against children. The information contained in his most recent report (S/2017/821) is alarming. While there have been improvements in some countries, notably involving the adoption of action plans to end violations against children, in others, the recruitment and use of children is re-emerging, and violations of children's rights, including killings as a result of military operations — by both State and non-State actors — have intensified.

It is intolerable that so many children in situations of conflict are denied humanitarian access and deprived of the most essential human rights, such as food, water and health care, as is the growing disregard for international law, including human rights and humanitarian law by armed groups and Government forces. All of this has an extremely harmful impact on children's rights and on countries' prospects for lasting peace, stability and development.

We recognize the significant progress achieved and the existence of a strong normative framework and of a mechanism to monitor, report and respond to grave violations of children's rights. However, the challenges ahead remain huge and must be firmly addressed. The Council has an important responsibility in that regard when addressing the changing nature of conflicts, protracted conflicts, the prevalence of violent extremism and the proliferation of non-State armed groups, including terrorist groups. Children in armed conflict require special protection that must be granted and never forgotten or disregarded. Peacekeeping operations' mandates must consistently address child protection and must be given the necessary financial means and human resources to be effective in that regard. In addition, children deserve a central focus in every post-conflict peacebuilding plan. In this regard, Portugal supports the inclusion of child-protection provisions in the mandates of peace operations and mandatory predeployment training on child protection for all United Nations troop and police contingents. We also support the effective screening of peacekeepers to ensure that individuals who have committed violations against children do not serve with the United Nations.

Furthermore, prevention, integration, rehabilitation and cooperation, at both the domestic and international levels, are critical elements for the success of this agenda. Children who have been victims of conflict need help to physically and psychologically recover from the traumatic damages they have suffered and to be socially reintegrated. Such help should never be disregarded. Efforts should actively include demobilization and the safe return of displaced and refugee children.

It is for the international community to ensure that child-rehabilitation programmes and educational training are part of the planning for efforts to address post-conflict situations and that adequate resources are devoted to that particular component. By now, we all understand how urgent it is to address the challenge of reintegrating children deprived of their liberty for their alleged association with extremist groups. From the start, those children must be recognized as primary victims of forcible recruitment who have been exposed to extreme brutality.

Attacks on and the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes must not continue with impunity. Portugal reiterates its active engagement in providing access to education for children, including higher education, in emergency situations and calls on all Governments to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration. Access to education is both a mechanism to prevent the recruitment and targeting of children, including in the context of violent extremism and terrorism, and an effective means for addressing the root causes of conflict. Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 16 provide good frameworks for action in that context.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, along with the Paris Principles — which more than 105 States, including Portugal, have endorsed — continue to provide an adequate basis for action. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Paris Commitments and the Paris Principles, which provide guidelines for protecting children from recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups. Portugal invites all Member States that have not yet done so to consider endorsing and fully implementing the Paris Principles.

In conclusion, protecting children from the ravages of war is a moral imperative and a relevant part of international peace and security. The international community is equipped to improve the situation of children in armed conflicts and to address the root causes of conflict. Unequivocal political commitments and good will are required to make a dramatic difference for the sake of innocent children who have been trapped by grown-ups' wars.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Denmark.

Mr. Petersen (Denmark): I have the honour of making this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Norway and my own country, Denmark.

First, let me reiterate the full support of the Nordic countries for the 2007 Paris Commitments and Paris Principles and express the appreciation of our countries for the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821) and the statement made by the Special Representative, Ms. Gamba, this morning.

The Nordic countries strongly condemn the recruitment and use of children by any party to conflict. Non-State armed groups, including violent extremist groups, use children to perpetrate acts of violence. All children associated with armed forces or armed groups must be considered primarily as victims. At the same time, we must not forget the children who travel to and return from conflicts with their families, in addition to children born in the context of conflict.

Preventing and combating the radicalization of children is an issue that concerns us all. Although the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is now losing territory, the threat of that group's ideology and propaganda remains. As part of the aftermath, we will continue to face a new generation born in conflict or radicalized. That is only one example, and it raises a number of challenges that we need to address. We know that kinship, forced recruitment, slavery, lack of education, and online and offline propaganda are all important explanatory factors for radicalization and violent extremism.

We note that some military responses against non-State armed groups perpetrating violent extremism have raised challenges with regard to the protection of children. In some cases, State-allied militia and vigilante groups have been mobilized and used children in support roles or even as combatants. When responding to violent extremism, Member States should ensure that their rules of engagement take into account that children may be living in areas under the control of armed groups or may be used on the front lines following their abduction or recruitment.

We need to deal with this problem urgently. We need a long-term perspective to prevent more children from being recruited and used by non-State armed groups, including violent extremist groups. We need to address all forms of violent extremism through a variety of preventive and long-term international, national and local measures. Let me stress that such measures must always be in conformity with applicable international law, including human rights law and rule of law principles.

Jordan and Norway recently launched the Group of Friends of Preventing Violent Extremism, which is now active in the United Nations. The aim of the Group is to seek balanced implementation of the four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, with appropriate attention to all of its pillars. That initiative has the full support and participation of the Nordic countries.

On behalf of the Nordic Countries, please allow me to emphasize six challenges facing the international community in addressing this issue.

First, we need to strengthen our efforts to provide high-quality education to children in times of conflict. Access to safe schools and education is a human right and a precondition for development. We need to provide children with the tools necessary to develop critical thinking, a vital part of preventing radicalization and violent extremism.

Secondly, it is imperative that we share best practices and increase cooperation on all levels. We must support and learn from non-governmental stakeholders, such as civil society, women's organizations, youth organizations, scholars and practitioners, in order to adapt to new challenges.

Thirdly, we need to work together with private entities, establish good global solutions to prevent the proliferation of online propaganda material and the recruitment of children to engage in violent extremism. We need to identify and stop online radicalizers who target our children and our youth.

Fourthly, we must ensure a comprehensive and balanced implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. More emphasis on eliminating conditions conducive to terrorism and on the respect for human rights and the rule of law is necessary, as are efforts across the United Nations system to ensure the prevention of violent extremism.

Fifthly, child protection concerns must be included in all efforts to end conflicts. That includes United Nations missions, where training in child protection for civilian and military personnel should be a key priority. The role of child-protection advisors must be protected.

Sixthly and finally, but perhaps most urgently, we need to ensure that traumatized children and children affected by radicalization receive the attention they need. We need to tailor specific programmes for the reintegration of such children into society, including psychosocial support. We must ensure that children are protected and treated as children and in accordance with juvenile justice systems.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the delegation of France for presiding over the work of the Security Council during the current month and for convening this open debate. We also appreciate the briefings by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, to whom we express our full support. We are also grateful for the statement made by Mr. Mubin Shaikh and welcome the presence Mr. Roméo Dallaire.

Children continue to be the main victims of armed conflicts, which take place in various regions throughout the world and in which their human rights are severely violated by the actions of armed groups, including terrorist organizations and the military forces of some States. In that regard, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/821), in some countries, very few cases of violations against children were recorded in 2017 or there was a reduction in the number of violations. However, in other countries, the gravity of such violations has worsened with a shocking number of deaths, mutilations, cases of recruitment, exploitation, sexual abuse and direct attacks on boys and girls — with record numbers of such crimes and violations recorded in several areas.

For Venezuela, it is tragic and ethically unacceptable that such violations continue to take place, and that obstacles to protecting children affected by armed conflict still exist. Apparently, our collective conscience remains unmoved, and we fail to adopt urgent measures that would enable us to reverse the situation. There is something very wrong with humankind in today's globalized society.

We believe that the best strategy that we can employ to shield children from the pernicious consequences of war is one of conflict prevention and resolution, principally by addressing its overall root causes. It is a contradiction to want firm and lasting peace when there is a considerable number of boys and girls who grow up surrounded by armed violence and hatred, as well as by economic and social deprivation, which is the result of poverty and social exclusion. Marginalization, along with the impact of armed conflict, puts in serious jeopardy the chances for children and adolescents to shoulder responsibility, in a few years, for the future of countries with a culture of peace and sustainable development.

This year's report also mentions that attacks carried out by terrorist organizations, such as Da'esh, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, among others, have had serious repercussions on children. Such terrorist entities commit barbaric acts that are a threat to humanity itself, and lead to abuses and violations of children's rights. In that regard, we reiterate our ongoing condemnation of the fact that foreign military intervention and wars in the Middle East and North Africa have been one of the main reasons why children become victims of violence and why their societies get destroyed, which, in turn, strips them of their rights and their future.

In that regard, we call for the cessation of all foreign military intervention, in particular in those regions, as well as for the end to the destabilization of entire societies for geopolitical and economic purposes, the transfer of weapons, and the funding, training and safe haven given to extremist and terrorist groups. We urge all States to take action in line with the Charter of the United Nations, the provisions of international instruments and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Similarly, we are concerned about that fact that addressing the terrorist threat has also led to an increase in the number of human rights violations and greater suffering among the civilian population, in particular, children. We therefore call for every effort to be made to address those scourges and scrupulously respect international humanitarian law, in accordance with the principles of distinction and proportionality. The States Members of the United Nations must be consistent in their action when protecting children in armed conflict. When holding to account those who have committed violations against children in armed conflict, we must adhere to the principles of objectivity, non-selectivity and impartiality. No one should be exempt, be they non-State armed groups or State armed forces.

In that regard, we must also say a word about the situation of Palestinian children, who have been enduring acts of aggression and violence perpetrated by the occupying Power. In addition, more than 700 children have been arbitrarily detained in Israeli prisons. Similarly, we are concerned about the violence carried out by the forces of the occupying Power against children, which has claimed lives and left many injured. We call on the Government of Israel and the Security Council to take measures to end such human rights violations.

In conclusion, Venezuela reaffirms its commitment to supporting and assisting multilateral efforts aimed at protecting and helping children, because it is an urgent ethical commitment that must be honoured in line with international law.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): I wish to thank the delegation of France, this month's President of the Security Council, for holding today's open debate on children and armed conflict. There can be nothing more important and more urgent than holding discussions about, and providing solutions for, the problem of children in armed conflicts. No child should fight a war, and no child should suffer from war. Anyone who recruits children to fight in conflicts should receive the harshest punishment under the law.

The Maldives takes note of the very active role that the Council has played on the issue. In particular, we recognize the crucial role that the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict can play in protecting the rights of children. Yet, on a daily basis, we witness that boys and girls are being tortured, imprisoned, starved, and sexually abused and killed in conflict situations. In some parts of the world, their homes and schools are destroyed and, in some instances, schools are used for military purposes, thereby depriving thousands of children of access to education.

The Council, in particular the Working Group, should remain most objective in collecting and analysing information about situations involving children in armed conflicts. It should also remain firm in taking action to bring an end to the vile activity of using children as soldiers or even as human shields in conflicts. One important way in which the Council can accelerate its efforts towards such an outcome could be to cultivate values of respect for children. Working with UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme, the Council can encourage national Governments to take strong action to promote such values at the levels of the individual and society.

In the Maldives, protecting the rights of the child is among the top priority issues for the Government of President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom. Our actions are guided by the belief that children have a God-given right to be loved, cared for and protected from violence, abuse, neglect and maltreatment. The Maldives has undertaken a number of legislative measures, as well as policy initiatives, to strengthen the child-protection system.

In recent months, the Maldives has established a child-protection database, which has strengthened referral mechanisms between the Ministry of Gender and Family and the Maldives police service for the easy exchange of information and, more importantly, to generate real-time disaggregated data. In addition, the Ministry of Education has launched an information system to closely monitor school attendance, which also ensures that every child is enrolled in accordance with the Government's no-child-left-behind policy. To further encourage the reporting of incidents of violence, the Government established a child-help line, which is a 24-hour toll-free centre, with a mobile reporting application, through which reports or complaints can be made anonymously. That should help to remove barriers hindering a child from seeking protection, despite our unique geography with a population dispersed across 188 islands. We have also established family- and children-services centres in each of the 19 atolls of the Maldives, which will further help to provide the urgent care needed by any victim.

As the Council is well aware, children and youth have become constant targets for recruitment into conflicts by violent extremist groups. The preferred instrument used for such recruitment is social media. Protecting children from social media assaults is another priority area in which my Government is taking strong measures. That is an area in which the Council can work more closely with the relevant United Nations agencies so as to enable Member States to design and implement policies that can protect children from cyberviolence.

Protecting the right of children to live free of violence, abuse or conflict means protecting tomorrow — our shared future. The Maldives stands ready to play its part and to enable the Council to help shape the future of our children and their children through our shared solutions.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Paraguay.

Mr. Carrillo Gómez (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Paraguay, which appreciates the initiative of the French presidency of the Security Council in convening today's open debate. We thank the Secretary-General and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict for their briefings.

Universalizing our commitments on the protection of children in armed conflicts will be fundamental to the international community's ability to respond in a comprehensive and coordinated manner to every aspect of that scourge. The delegation of Paraguay therefore urges Member States, first of all, to ratify or accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and its amendments, and the Protocols Additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions relating to the protection of victims of international and non-international armed conflicts. We also urge all members of the international community to refrain from any act that is contrary to the aims and purposes of those international instruments.

Paraguay highlights the relevance of the 2007 Paris Principles and Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Safe Schools Declaration for the protection of children in armed conflicts, endorsed in Oslo in 2015 and to which we adhere. We urge Member States to accede to those instruments and take concrete action to implement them.

At the same time, Member States and the United Nations system must collaborate closely with States in conflict and post-conflict situations to strengthen their institutional capacities and tackle the challenges posed by children's involvement in armed conflicts. To that end, the Governments of Paraguay and Colombia are cooperating on the implementation of the Peace Agreement between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo through a cultural exchange programme to prevent the recruitment and use of minors by armed groups and foster social inclusion, peaceful coexistence and intercultural dialogue through music. As part of that cooperation initiative, Paraguayan teachers have organized training activities in Colombia for teachers and students of the harp in San José de Guaviare and Puerto Carreño in Vichada department.

The design of institutional frameworks for reintegrating boys and girls who are the victims of armed conflict, or for caring for refugee children, must provide for children's comprehensive protection. The priority must be a focus on the best interests of the child, implemented through legislation and special jurisdiction, with specialized courts, judges, prosecutors and public defenders and the advice of interdisciplinary professionals on all cases involving children in any capacity. In Paraguay, a network of municipal departments supports that system through preventive efforts for protecting, promoting and supervising the best interests of the child, as well as implementing measures for child protection and support such as giving children and their families guidance and support and providing schooling and health care, including psychological help.

Lastly, with regard to the Security Council, special protection for children in armed conflicts must be a priority and a clear and explicit part of peacekeeping operation mandates. The Council must incorporate prevention mechanisms and protocols into mandates with a view to aiding victims and ensuring that those who recruit or use children in armed conflicts are held accountable.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

Ms. Theofili (Greece): I would first like to thank the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, for her excellent work. I would also like to express my appreciation to the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate. France has contributed significantly to the international community's efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, especially through the Principles and Commitments adopted at the International Conferences held in Paris in February 2007 and 2017.

Children, who are unable to protect themselves, are the main victims of armed conflict. Besides the terrible threats to a life of freedom and dignity that they face, children in conflict-affected areas are completely vulnerable to unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or groups, a practice that merits the full attention and immediate response of the international community if any real progress is to be achieved in that direction. It is imperative that all States immediately halt weapons sales and exports to parties that have been identified on the Secretary-General's list of shame. At the same time, we need to focus on reintegrating child soldiers through programmes that provide the necessary psychosocial support to them and their communities.

In the same context, the numerous violations of international norms and standards for the protection of children, as indicated in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2017/821), include attacks on educational facilities. Following the recent Arria Formula meeting of the Security Council on attacks on schools, and listening to the testimony of Joy Bishara, one of the schoolgirls abducted in Nigeria back in 2014, we feel we must do everything in our power to address the root causes of such attacks and bring to justice all who are depriving children of the right to an education and a normal and fulfilling life.

Violations of international human law — in other words, atrocities against children — must not be tolerated in any form. For that reason, Greece, having already endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, aligns itself with the joint statement of States that have also endorsed it, underlining that the Declaration is a very important initiative that needs our full support. Having also participated at both the Safe Schools Conferences in Oslo in May 2015 and Buenos Aires in March 2017, we call on all States to sign and implement the Safe Schools Declaration with a view to protecting schools in conflict-affected areas around the world from violence in any form. Children are the future of our societies. We must all do everything in our power to protect that future.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Andorra.

Mrs. Vives Balmaña (Andorra) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for holding today's open debate, which gives us an opportunity to pool our efforts to address the plight of children in armed conflicts.

We fully support the statements delivered by the representatives of Canada, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and Norway, on behalf of the group of 35 States that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. I would like to add a few words in my national capacity.

Every child counts, everywhere, all the time. We therefore welcome the report (S/2017/821) and comments of the Secretary-General and of his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba. We also thank her Office for their efforts over the past 20 years and all the actors concerned on the ground, such as UNICEF. Thanks to their ongoing work, we have understood the persistent and disturbing nature of this problem in complex situations of armed conflict with non-State actors.

However, we are also seeing hope. We see that States are becoming aware of the situation through their development of national action plans. That is an encouraging outcome for the United Nations, which has succeeding in creating the frameworks that make it possible for the parties to armed conflict to respect the rights of children.

Andorra wishes to work for peace and the defence of children's lives and rights. When it deposited its instrument of ratification for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in January 1996, Andorra deplored the lack of a ban on the use of children in armed conflict and voiced its disagreement with article 38, which allowed for recruitment at the age of 15. As a result, in 2000, the Principality joined the signatories to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which formally prohibits the recruitment of children into armed forces.

We have also supported the Paris Principles — the tenth anniversary of which we are currently celebrating — so as to provide fresh momentum to efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Over and above the human cost, the destruction of infrastructure and the interruption of economic growth, armed conflict has devastating effects on the education of generations. We therefore believe that it is essential to provide genuine, unfailing protection to children, teachers and associated personnel, as well as infrastructure. It is with that in mind that Andorra endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, which aims to actively reduce the impact of violence and conflict on educational institutions and stresses the importance of guaranteeing opportunities for lifelong learning, even in conflict situations. We ask all States to adhere to and implement the Declaration.

A holistic approach to the reintegration of children into their communities must also take into account the issue of stigmatization. In that context, we wish to focus on girl victims, who suffer the most sexual exploitation and abuse. Their protection therefore requires even greater levels of support. In that regard, we support the zero-tolerance policy launched by the Secretary-General in September.

The interest sparked by this open debate shows that progress will continue to be made on all dimensions of this issue. Children and armed conflict are not compatible. Specific action plans and their implementation require firm political commitment. If peacekeeping plans and political action in general take into account the best interests of children while focusing on education for peace, we will undoubtedly create an environment conducive to the prevention of conflict.

The future of our world relies on the implementation of those values.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Plasai (Thailand) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to join others in expressing my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821) and to France for having convened this open debate. I thank Mr. Mubin Shaikh for his insightful briefing, and I also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba for her briefing and warmly congratulate her on her appointment as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, while paying tribute to the efforts of her predecessor, Ms. Leila Zerrougui.

The Kingdom of Thailand aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Human Security Network.

Children represent a quarter of the world's population and are key to our future development and prosperity. In situations of conflict, children must be protected so that we can safeguard their potential to engage in society and become modern voices for change and progress. The Kingdom of Thailand condemns the involvement of children in violence and armed conflict. In that context, we recognize the important efforts made so far on this issue, such as the adoption of the Paris Principles and Paris Commitments, as well as the convening of the conference on protecting children from war, held in Paris in February.

According to the report of the Secretary-General, more than 4,000 violations of children's rights were committed in 2016 by Government forces. The best way to address that phenomenon is to ensure the universality and the full and effective implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and all of its Optional Protocols. For the same period, more than 11,500 verified violations were attributed to non-State groups. That is an alarming trend, and the best approach to address the problem is to engage and cooperate with the States involved and take careful account of the unique context of each conflict. In any case, all parties to a conflict must respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law and put a definitive end to the culture of impunity.

We all have an important role to play on this issue, and we should do so together. Civil society, the media, academic institutions and Governments must work in concert in order to keep pace with the evolving tactics of non-State actors, including online recruitment and aggressive use of social media. In that regard, awareness-raising and education can provide the best defence for children who would otherwise fall prey to those tactics. At the same time, the international community must continue to address the long-term impacts on children who have been recruited by formulating adequate plans for their reintegration and rehabilitation.

The Secretary-General's annual report plays an important role in guiding Member States in their efforts to strengthen child protection in situations of armed conflict. For that reason, all listing efforts should be objective and comprehensive, based on credible and impartial information. In that regard, we commend the work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in enhancing dialogue with Member States in the preparation of the report. We also support its efforts in exploring new ideas so as to ensure the full implementation of its mandate, particularly by conducting further relevant research and analysis, as well as focusing more on raising awareness on the issue. That approach could be particularly useful if conducted at the regional level by engaging with regional organizations.

The suffering endured by children in armed conflict is not acceptable. The international community must work to put an end to that suffering, and those responsible must be brought to justice.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): Allow me to join others in congratulating the French Republic on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October and to sincerely thank it for having convened yet another open debate on children and armed conflict, shortly after having organized the open debate last week on realizing the promise of the women and peace and security agenda.

In that regard, I would like to commend you, Madam President, for your outstanding work, for the leadership and commitment that you have demonstrated during your tenure and for placing on the global agenda matters that have a bearing on the welfare of women and children, as they are among the most vulnerable in society. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the

Secretary-General for his briefing and for his annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821). Equally, I wish to thank the respective briefers, including Ms. Gamba, who is here with us, for their very insightful contributions to the topic under discussion.

The report of the Secretary-General provides a harrowing account of the recruitment and use of child soldiers and of the increasing number of children killed and maimed in armed conflict. The United Nations has estimated that in 2016 more than 8,000 children were killed or maimed and that there were over 14,500 violations of international norms and standards on the protection of children in armed conflict. It is also disturbing that the recruitment and use of child soldiers has been prevalent in war-torn countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Consequently, the number of child casualties and cases of sexual violence against children has also been increasing.

It is also alarming that the estimated number of child casualties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo increased by 75 per cent last year, while Afghanistan had the highest recorded number of child casualties, standing at 3,512 during the armed conflict. The conflict in Yemen has affected over 11 million children, with reported cases of grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, including atrocities against children.

Given the gravity of that matter, Botswana applauds the Council for adopting the historic resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict, and for convening open debates on the topic for the past 12 years. Botswana also commends the Security Council for establishing the monitoring and reporting mechanism to gather and provide timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on the recruitment and use of child soldiers, including documenting violations and abuses committed against children in conflict situations.

My country fully supports the initiatives adopted in recent years to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and to protect and promote the rights and welfare of children in armed conflict. In that connection, Botswana reaffirms its support for the mandates of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children and the UNICEF Children, Not Soldiers campaign.

We also support the development and implementation of norms and standards, the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, the United Nations code of conduct, the deployment of child protection advisers in United Nations peacekeeping operations, and the safeguarding of the rights of children in peace processes, peace agreements, post-conflict recovery and reconstruction programmes.

Botswana strongly condemns indiscriminate attacks on schools, hospitals and homes. We are deeply concerned that such attacks have been on the increase. The United Nations estimated in 2016 that 753 schools had been attacked that year. To demonstrate our commitment to safeguarding education during armed conflict, in June Botswana signed the Safe Schools Declaration.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm Botswana's commitment to international and regional instruments that promote and protect the rights of children, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and Africa's Agenda for Children 2040: Fostering an Africa Fit for Children. It is the duty of us all to secure the future of our children and spare them the agony of conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Yardley (Australia): Children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict, which is never of their own making. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/821) so clearly outlines, unacceptable numbers of children continue to be killed, maimed, recruited, abducted, sexually abused and denied humanitarian assistance, health care and education. And we know that verified violations are only the tip of the iceberg. That inhumanity must stop.

Australia welcomes the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and child protection advisers to protect children affected by armed conflict. We commend the progress made, including the delisting of the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for child recruitment, as well as the large numbers of children separated from armed groups in the Central African Republic and from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines. We also welcome the signing of new action plans with Mali, the Sudan and the Civilian Joint Task Force in Nigeria.

However, more must be done to shield the world's children from the impact of armed conflict. Let me highlight four key issues.

First, Australia believes that the accurate and credible listing of perpetrators in the annual report is crucial. We commend the Secretary-General for ensuring that all parties responsible for the commission of grave violations are listed. We also welcome the introduction of the new reporting format, which acknowledges where a party is taking steps to end such violations. We hope that it will serve as an added incentive for parties to put an end to violations.

Secondly, action plans to prevent child recruitment and use have had a significant impact. As the majority of groups known to recruit children are non-State armed actors, we need to continue efforts to ensure that those groups conclude action plans. We commend Special Representative Gamba on her efforts to engage proactively with those parties.

Thirdly, child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions play an important role in verifying, preventing and ending grave violations. Australia therefore supports the maintenance of dedicated child protection advisers on the ground.

Fourthly, it is impossible to overstate the importance of the reintegration of former child soldiers so as to ensure that sustainable peace is established. Working with communities, health workers, policymakers, schools and tertiary institutions to support the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups is crucial to helping those children return successfully to civilian life, thereby enabling them to reach their full human potential.

Australia is proud to have endorsed the Paris Principles and Commitments. Those standards have informed national and international efforts to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict. And yet, around the world, we continue to bear witness to the devastating impact of armed conflict on children. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles, the urgent need for renewed effort is clear.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Yánez Loza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks the Permanent Mission of France for convening this open debate. Ecuador believes that it is important that here, within the Security Council, all States be able to express their concern regarding the situation of children in armed conflict, especially given that, in addition to the vulnerability of their situation and the countless abuses they endure, they are deprived of education and, without access to it, further deprived of the possibility of having a future in which they can fully enjoy their human rights.

Ecuador thanks the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/821) and the briefing he delivered this morning. We are thank France for the concept note (S/2017/891,annex) issued as a guide for this meeting.

As the Secretary-General and Special Representative for Children Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, so eloquently noted, the situation of children is becoming increasingly precarious, not just because of the number and gravity of violations in countries in conflict, both on the Security Council and outside of it, but also because all the atrocities covered in the report highlight the ever-more alarming situation of children who fall prey to State and non-State actors. To protect children, we need a collective and comprehensive response that takes into account their particular circumstances and needs for protection, and that addresses the many reported violations of international law, the denial of access to humanitarian assistance, and the recruitment, kidnapping and sexual violence to which they are subject.

The Secretary-General's report also highlights how schools are used for military purposes and how educational infrastructure is destroyed. As a signatory to the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration of 2015, Ecuador endorses the content of the Declaration presented by the Permanent Mission of Norway. It expresses its full support for the need to protect students, teachers and educational infrastructure in times of armed conflict, and stresses the importance of continuing education during armed conflicts and of implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

All of this is linked to Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. That is important for my country, which our Constitution defines as a territory of peace. The function of the armed forces and police is to protect the rights, liberties and guarantees of citizens. Our Constitution also stipulates that girls, boys and teenagers will be given priority in cases of disaster, armed conflict and other types of emergencies.

That is why we believe that the figures included in the report cannot become the norm; rather, they call for a comprehensive response on the part of States. That response must in particular include the commitment that those responsible will not go unpunished. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba, with whose work we are all familiar, should receive the necessary financial and political support.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I offer my most sincere gratitude to the French delegation for organizing today's important open debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for the report before us(S/2017/821) and welcome his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba. She can count on our full support.

Terrorist groups such as Da'esh and Al-Qaida continue to carry out attacks on children in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Somalia. Children are abducted and turned into soldiers; they are used as human shields or suicide bombers — a growing phenomenon in armed conflicts. The Kingdom of Bahrain condemns those practices of terrorist groups in the strongest possible terms.

The protection of children in armed conflict is a priority for the international community, especially in the light of the number and complexity of those conflicts. That is why, as a member of the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen, which was established at the request of the Government of Yemen and in compliance with resolution 2216 (2015), we have taken steps to stop the attacks being carried out by terrorist groups that are receiving assistance, including military assistance and weapons that are smuggled into Yemeni territory, from foreign sources. We wanted to act within the Coalition to protect civilians, particularly children, and to uphold international law and international humanitarian law.

With regard to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, it is important to review the mechanisms that we use to protect children in armed conflict, because the information and data we use must be accurate and well documented.

Children around the world, particularly in Yemen and Palestine, are in danger. The crises should seize our collective conscience. We continue to work with our partners, brotherly countries and neighbours to protect children and uphold our commitments to providing humanitarian assistance and cooperating with various mechanisms of the United Nations in that area.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to commend the French presidency for convening today's important open debate and for submitting a concept note (S/2017/892, annex) on the topic. We also take note of the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2017/821), which covers the period from January to December 2016. We also thank the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba and other briefers for their insightful statements.

Azerbaijan is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. My Government has strongly and consistently supported international efforts aimed at ensuring more effective protection for the rights of children and improving the situation of children affected by armed conflict. We welcome the progress made in preventing and responding to grave violations committed against children.

However, serious challenges remain and children continue to suffer in situations of armed conflict. The increasing brutality and changing nature of warfare give rise to a need for greater measures of protection. Although most of the violations and abuses against children in situations of armed conflict are committed by non-State armed groups, the wrongs of the recent past and the targeting of civilians in ongoing inter-State conflicts must not be neglected.

Over the course of the continued aggression by the Republic of Armenia against my country, serious violations of international humanitarian law have been committed, amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide. A scorched-earth policy implemented by the Armenian side involved the ethnic cleansing of the seized territories of all Azerbaijanis and the brutal killing or wounding of thousands of civilians, including children. Azerbaijan continues to suffer from one of the highest number of refugees and displaced persons in the world, many of whom are children. As the Secretary-General rightly observes in his report,

> "The unprecedented number of refugee children and internally displaced children is not the result of conflict alone but of the brutality with which parties conduct hostilities, including by directly targeting children" (*S/2017/821, para. 15*).

As of 1 October, 3,874 citizens of Azerbaijan were registered as missing as a result of the conflict. Among them are 744 civilians, including 66 children — 22 girls and 44 boys. Of them, 29 children, 7 girls and 22 boys were taken hostage before they went missing. The Republic of Armenia refuses to cooperate in order to determine the fate of those missing persons. The impunity still enjoyed by the perpetrators of the crimes committed in the course of the Armenian aggression not only impedes progress in achieving the long-awaited peace and reconciliation, but also aggravates the situation on the ground.

Despite the formal ceasefire, direct and deliberate attacks by the Armenian armed forces against civilians and civilian objects in Azerbaijan, situated along or further behind the front lines, continue to date and have become even more frequent and more violent in recent times. Therefore, the assessment report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that was released following its mission to the affected areas of Azerbaijan in May 2016 made it abundantly clear, inter alia, that due to the use of new and heavier types of military hardware and the intense fighting during the escalation earlier in April 2016, many schools were damaged and closed in the areas near the frontline in the Goranboy, Tartar, Aghdam and Aghjebedi districts of Azerbaijan.

Under international law, intentionally directing attacks on buildings dedicated to education is a war crime. It should also be noted that attacks on schools and hospitals constitute one of the grave violations that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is mandated to monitor and report on. Among the victims of the recent ceasefire violations committed by the armed forces of Armenia are a two-year-old resident of the Fuzuli district of Azerbaijan, Ms. Zahra Guliyeva, who was killed alongside her grandmother on 4 July, while another woman was seriously wounded as a result of intensive fire with 82- and 120-millimetre mortars and heavy grenade launchers. A 13-year-old resident of the Tovuz district of Azerbaijan, Ramin Yusifov, received multiple shrapnel wounds as a result of a heavy shelling of his village on 7 August.

The vulnerability of children in wartime requires more targeted and comprehensive protection efforts worldwide, which must be free of selectivity and address all situations of armed conflict without distinction, including those of a protracted nature and prolonged impact on children in particular. We concur with the Secretary-General that, in order to break the cycles of violence and aid prevention efforts, the enhanced protection of civilians and respect for international humanitarian law are needed, and impunity must end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alyemany (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to align itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Norway on behalf of the signatory countries of the Safe Schools Declaration.

I would like to reiterate the commitment of the Yemeni Government to protecting children and preventing their recruitment in armed conflicts. The Government has taken several measures to those ends, including a decree issued in November 2012 by the Yemeni president, Mr. Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, prohibiting the recruitment of children under 18 into the army or security forces. He has directed all military and the police forces not to recruit to children under 18 and stressed that such recruitment was unlawful. Further, an action plan was signed in May 2014 between the Government of Yemen and UNICEF to end child recruitment in the armed forces. We have repeatedly requested that specialized United Nations agencies help the Government to begin implementing the plan, particularly in the light of the fact that Houthi coup militias in Yemen have extensively recruited and exploited children, which is reflected in the figures contained in the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict for the years 2015 (S/2016/360) and 2016 (S/2017/821).

An agreement has been developed with the Office of the Special Representative to establish a system to register newborns and infant deaths so that information can be referenced in determining the age of applicants who seek to join the military. The agreement also contains provisions for exploring the possibility of creating units in the Yemeni Army for protecting children and for training armed forces personnel on the protection of children. Based on our commitment to the protection of children and to preventing their suffering in situations of conflict and violence, we have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, which aims to protect children and schools during armed conflicts. As such, Yemen is the seventy-second State to endorse the Declaration. Indeed, in her briefing this morning, Ms. Gamba welcomed Yemen's signing of the Declaration.

With respect to the Secretary-General's report for 2016, I would like to make the following observations. First, we strongly denounce and find it strange that the report equates the legitimate Government and the armed coup militias when it is the legitimate Government alone that is cooperating with United Nations and seeking to protect its people and prevent the recruitment of children. The Government is committed to international law and to the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2216 (2015), which is seen in the progress achieved in the period between the 2015 report and the current report.

The United Nations continues to rely on civil society organizations and individuals affiliated with the Houthi militias that are deliberately misleading international public opinion as its sources. These organizations and individuals are seeking by any and all means to transform the political crisis into a humanitarian crisis and are fabricating the figures to direct accusations against the Arab Coalition and the Yemeni Government. For its sources, the United Nations is relying on the registries of the Ministry of Health and hospitals controlled by the Houthi militias, which are deliberately fabricating such registries and providing the United Nations with baseless figures. They are deliberately exaggerating the reality to achieve political gain. Since the beginning of Ms. Gamba's work, we have objected to the monitoring approach that has been adopted, and we have requested greater transparency and affirmed our readiness to cooperate with her Office to uncover the truth.

International organizations are weakly represented in liberated areas, where, as we have repeatedly said, they have no offices. This exposes these organizations to unilateral and unreliable sources. The United Nations continues to neglect our request to remedy this situation.

In conclusion, we hope that the progress achieved by the Yemeni Government in the area of protecting children will be reflected in future reports of the Secretary-General through the delisting of the armed forces and air coalition from the report's annex. We welcome the cooperation of Ms. Gamba's Office, in particular her willingness to adopt preventive measures for the protection of children, collaborate with different Governments and dissociate herself from the kind of propaganda that does not serve cooperation but widens the gap between the United Nations agencies and Member States. We also look forward to her Office's assisting the Yemeni Government in implementing the action plan for 2014 and to protecting children from the effects of armed conflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Ms. Bassols (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Children and armed conflict is much more than a mere item on the Security Council agenda. It is a collective responsibility that, as States Members of the United Nations and as human beings, we all have the ethical imperative to address. In the face of the recruitment of minors, the bombing of schools, abductions, rapes and murders of children, we have to be unyielding and demand strict compliance with international humanitarian law and the resolutions of the Security Council.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/821) and the French presidency for organizing this open debate today. I also welcome the adoption today of presidential statement S/PRST/2017/21.

I will focus my statement on an essential topic — the credibility of the list of those responsible for attacks against children and armed conflict. I will then briefly touch upon three issues: the commitment of Spain to this agenda, the attacks on doctors and hospitals, and the measures that we are proposing with respect to United Nations capabilities — thanks to which it can publish the robust reports it publishes — in terms of accountability of non-State actors.

With respect to list annexed to the report of the Secretary-General, I would like to underscore that it is a very useful tool only to the extent that it is credible. It therefore requires a scrupulous respect for the process of information-gathering by the United Nations, which must continue to be a transparent and neutral process. Spain expresses its support for the Secretary-General and for the work of his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in order to ensure that the list continues to play its role of denunciation and as an offer of assistance to the parties of a conflict contained in it, with a view to their eventual delisting. That list must be accompanied by accurate information regarding the progress made by the parties included therein and the signing and implementation of action plans with specific commitments.

Spain's commitment to the protection of children in armed conflicts is serious, firm and long-term. In 2000 Spain signed and, in 2002, ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict shortly following its adoption. In February, we participated in the ministerial-level conference "Protecting Children From War", held in Paris, dedicated to the protection of children in armed conflict and celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups. In addition, the following month we participated in the international Conference on Safe Schools held in Buenos Aires. Spain endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in 2015. I take this opportunity today to announce that we will endorse the peacekeeping principles aimed at preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, which Canada has proposed and will be offered for adoption at the upcoming summit in Vancouver.

I reaffirm our commitment to following up on resolution 2286 (2016), on attacks directed against medical personnel and hospitals, the effective implementation of which remains a challenge. Spain had the honour of participating in drafting the text of that resolution, which was adopted in 2016. We will continue working to implement and adapt the resolution in the coming weeks and months. Today, we align ourselves with the policy statement delivered by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, thereby reaffirming our national responsibility to prevent those types of attacks, which have serious consequences for children.

In order to continue making progress in the protection of children in armed conflicts, Spain prioritizes, first, incorporating the protection of children in a cross-cutting manner in the mandates of the United Nations missions; secondly, adequately equipping the components that involve the protection of minors, and ensuring sufficient financing for their protection mandates and necessary dialogue with the missions' leadership; and, thirdly, strengthening capacities intended to shore up the legal and judicial system of the affected countries. Accountability is key to combating impunity.

We must increase our focus on victims. Many attacks are perpetrated by non-State actors, regardless of where they occur. Children used by terrorist groups or those affiliated with armed groups, as well as girls recruited for the purpose of sexual exploitation, must be considered victims and must be provided with rehabilitation programmes. There is an urgent need for demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and resettlement programmes aimed at systematically integrating the specific needs of children.

With regard to the protection of children, given the scale of the challenge, any single effort is inadequate. The international community and the Council can count on Spain to combat it.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

Mr. Margaryan (Armenia): We thank the French presidency for organizing today's open debate and for providing the concept note (S/2017/892, annex). We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2017/821) and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict for her briefing.

As a country that has endorsed the Safe School Declaration, Armenia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Norway earlier today, and we call on other countries that have not yet done so to endorse the Safe School Declaration.

The international community needs to accelerate actions aimed at implementing target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which calls for ending all forms of violence against children. The report of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict once again reminds us of the tragic impact of conflicts upon children living in affected areas and the daily risks that they face. We strongly condemn violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its additional protocols, including, and in particular, when they concern the rights and the lives of children. Systematic and gross violations of human rights, the use of force and economic coercion, and the lack of international protection are among the main factors increasing the risks leading to the displacement of children and heavily affecting their right to life.

In our region, in a clear violation of humanitarian law, Azerbaijan has been placing military installations in civilian settlements and is using them as a launchpad for shelling along the line of contact with Nagorno Karabakh . The large-scale military offensive unleashed by Azerbaijan against Nagorno Karabakh in early April 2016 not only violated the ceasefire agreement, signed in 1994, and the 1995 trilateral agreement on the consolidation of the ceasefire, but also incurred gross violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The vicious armed aggression has resulted in the loss of many lives, including civilians, among whom are children and women.

As a result of the aggression of Azerbaijan against Nagorno Karabakh, civilian infrastructure and the civilian population, including children and the elderly, have become intentional and indiscriminate targets. The first civilian victims included a 12-year-old boy, who was killed, and two other schoolchildren, who were wounded, in the town of Martuni on their way to school. The indiscriminate shelling of civilian settlements, leading to the death of a schoolboy, and an incursion into a village characterized by despicable, barbaric acts against the civilian and service personnel — the footage of which has since been released on social media — are reminiscent of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaida. The masterminds and perpetrators of the atrocities amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity must be identified and brought to justice.

In the context of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, we have been observing deliberate attempts by Azerbaijan to derail the peace process by ongoing regular ceasefire violations and incursions across the border. It is also very troubling that Azerbaijan constantly deviates from previous agreements aimed at de-escalating the situation on the line of contact and establishing a mechanism of investigation of ceasefire violations that will help save the lives of civilians, including those of children.

The President (*spoke in French*): The representative of Israel has asked to me a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Heumann (Israel): It is regrettable that I need to take the floor for a second time today, but given some of the statements that have been made, I feel obliged to respond. I shall do so very quickly.

We heard today the Saudi representative address my country. This representative, whose country was just put on the blacklist as one of the worst violators of children's rights, has the audacity to criticize my country. Saudi Arabia is responsible for the killing and maiming of more than 600 children in the past year, and that has entitled it to be included on the list of those parties who commit grave violations against children. I warmly suggest to him that he make better use of his time and, instead of attempting to divert attention from his own country's crimes, that he develop a new policy that would actually take the rights of children into account and protect children from cruel and indiscriminate attacks in Yemen.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

Before adjourning the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of October, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of France to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives and their respective staff, and to the secretariat of the Council for all the support they have given to us. Indeed, it has been a busy month, and one in which we have been able to reach consensus on several important issues within our purview.

We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all relevant conference service officers, interpreters and translators. As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Italy good luck in the month of November.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.